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Refregier  
Rico

*May*  
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SPANISH POSTER  
In Colors by Liéo  
Engraved by Joe Di Gemma  
Cover by Shimin







*American Artists Present*

# AN AMBULANCE FOR SPAIN

**A**T a meeting held in New York City on Sunday, April 18, Chet La More, Baltimore member of the Artists Union presented the MEDICAL BUREAU TO AID SPANISH DEMOCRACY with an ambulance to serve at the American Base Hospital at Albacete, 50 miles from Madrid. Don Mansfield Caldwell, San Francisco mural painter has left to drive an ambulance in Spain. The artists of Chicago, Baltimore, San Francisco, Provincetown and other cities have raised additional funds for medical supplies and equipment.

In all, to date, 56 American surgeons, nurses and technicians with the help of 50 tons of medical supplies and equipment, including 12 ambulances, are saving hundreds of lives daily.

## **Flash!**

We have received the following cable from Dr. Edward H. Barsky, chief surgeon at the American Base Hospital:

ESTABLISHED SECOND BASE HOSPITAL TODAY 650  
BEDS RUSH ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON ASSISTANTS  
NURSES SUPPLIES AMBULANCES SPLENDID COOP-  
ERATION SPANISH HEALTH MINISTRY

Need More Be Said?

S A V E   A   L I F E   I N   S P A I N   T O D A Y !

MEDICAL BUREAU to Aid Spanish Democracy  
381 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

I enclose \$.....to save a life in Spain.

NAME .....

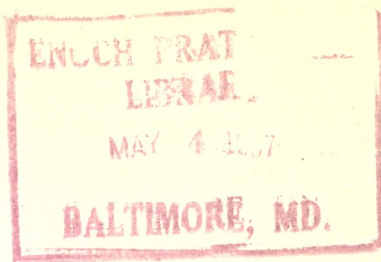
STREET .....

CITY ..... STATE .....



# The Artists' Unions

## BUILDERS OF A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE



**T**HE crash on the stock market in New York City, November, 1929, marked, among other things, the beginning of the open and shameless desertion by the wealthy of the cause of culture. As the crisis grew deeper it became increasingly clear that the entire market in culture had collapsed. The rotten core stood naked and exposed. Artists who had previously been petted joined the majority of their brothers in the ranks of those who are continuously hungry. Odd teaching and commercial jobs disappeared. Long isolated from the rest of society, the artists joined their fellow men on the bread lines and in the relief stations, when these were finally established.

In November, 1933, the Government of the United States established, under the Civil Works Administration, a short lived and utterly inadequate program of employment for the disinherited artists. Under this program a small fraction of the unemployed artists were put to work for the average period of three months. Then they were laid off. There was no one to speak in protest, there was no one to point out the discrepancy between the statements of government officials, who openly acknowledged the seriousness of the situation and the clear responsibility of the government to support art through employment of artists, and the arbitrary discontinuation of the Public Works of Art Program.

However, under the lash of this drastic lesson of unfulfilled promises, the artists began to understand and out of this understanding grew those first Artists' Committees, the pariahs of American culture, ragged, hungry, ostracized, but, above all, courageous and intelligent, determined to live with full rights as human beings and to create that, which none but they could make—an art for America.

This was three years ago, an extremely short time as history is reckoned. Yet in these three short years a few committees of unemployed artists have been transformed into the Artists' Unions of America, a national organization rooted securely in twenty states of the union, with a constantly and rapidly expanding member-

ship which stands roughly at the figure of 4,000 at the present time. Under the stimulus of organization the artists of the United States have been able to extend concrete help to their fellows in Canada with the result that organization of artists on this continent has become international. In three short years the artists of America have defeated the disease of Bohemianism and have built a tradition and a history of fighting trade unionism that at one and the same time marks the most significant change in the economic status of the artists in modern American society and represents the most vital, influential and progressive force in the field of plastic and graphic arts in our country.

During these three years the attention and activity of the Artists' Unions have been directed, in the main, to the basic problem of securing adequate government support so that unemployment among artists could be eliminated. In the face of grave commitments on the part of the government itself that such support was necessary if the artist and art were to continue, the validity of this basic program has never been and cannot be contested by any honest friend of art.

In the late summer of 1935, the federal government faced, for the first time, the hard fact that thousands of artists were on the relief rolls, where their creative talents and training were slowly but certainly going to waste. It established, as part of the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Art Project. In common with the entire W.P.A. program, the Federal Art Project was never given sufficient funds to employ all the artists on the relief rolls. The original plan called for the employment of approximately 4,000 persons over the entire country, a figure insufficient to meet the employment needs of the artists of one large center, New York City. This initial limitation placed upon the Federal Art Project not only condemned a large section of the unemployed artists to slow starvation on relief but likewise perpetuated their destruction as creative workers. In answer the artists presented their case and when their just demands for expansion were

rejected, *their Union fought*. It is only through this fight on the part of the Artists' Unions that the project ever reached its employment peak of 5,300 creative workers. Administration attack after attack, designed to throw the artists off the project, has been met and defeated. In consideration of the fact that curtailment of the project is universally admitted to mean serious retrogression for American culture, the struggle for the expansion of the project and the liberalization of the employment rules can by no stretch of the imagination be termed narrow and in the interest of a special group. The 219 artists who were brutally beaten by the police in the offices of the New York Administration of the Project last December, received upon their heads, blows which were struck at the entire future of our culture.

The fight to maintain and expand the Federal Art Project has never been considered by the Union as merely a problem of employment. From the first the rule that work done for the project could be permanently available only to public and semi-public institutions (supported in whole or part from public funds) has limited the scope of the project and kept it from serving to the fullest extent the masses of working and middle class Americans. At one time it was said, with justice, that the public had to be arrested, become seriously ill, or go insane in order to find there was a Federal Art Project because most of the work could be found only in courthouses, prisons, hospitals and psychopathic wards. The organizations of the majority of Americans could secure *only* the services of the art teachers—exhibitions of paintings, sculpture and graphic art were not available to them and at no price could they secure permanently any of the work done for the project. Only officials and politicians haunted the dim corners of the official institutions where the work was hung; the rest of America passed by the doors.

In the minds of the artists the restrictions cited above have become matters of increasing importance. The artists do not



want a government program for the support of art which merely furnishes employment. The Artists' Unions of America understand that such a project must serve the cultural needs of *all America* and they have fought and will continue to fight for such a project. To date the Unions, through their Public Use of Art Committees have won the right to have their work exhibited in the trade unions and mass organizations. With their own strength and understanding the artists have taught the Administration that the scope of the services of the project must be expanded and the first feeble but significant steps have been taken. Art has been brought down from the market places of the dealers and the Museums. It is no longer necessary for the worker and the middle class American to take his hat in hand and make a pilgrimage to some shrine to see a work of art. And this is only a beginning.

Many other important issues have been raised and fought for by the Artists' Unions. However, the Federal Art Project is and must remain the chief concern of all those who understand that *art in America has a future* and that future rests, not upon the old structure of private patronage, but *with the whole of working and middle class America*.

The Presidential election of November, 1936, constituted one of the severest blows against political and social reaction ever delivered in our country. Since that time we have witnessed the beginning of a tremendous movement throughout the United States wherein millions of our people, under the leadership of the Committee for Industrial Organization, have been able,

for the first time, to smash the stronghold of the open shop, the mass production and basic industries of the country. In the steel and automobile towns the banners of trade unionism have been raised. In the commercial centers, the most exploited sections of the white-collar workers, such as the 5 and 10 cent girls, have fought and have won the first skirmish. Economic democracy is on the march in America. It will not accept no for an answer.

Despite the attempts by reactionary newspapers to present the movement of workers as a threat to the middle class and as revolution, it is clear and even obvious that the resulting higher standard of living for the majority of the workers and the smashing of the economic seat of political and social reaction, which has been the "open shop," can only result in the betterment of the economic lot of every member of the middle class.

With the development of democracy in the sphere of wages and hours, with the inevitable political implications of this movement, the possibilities for the establishment of democracy *in the social sphere, including culture* will be realized. Free public education was not given to the American people; they fought to win it. Now they must fight to keep and extend their basic and inalienable *right to think* as well as merely to live.

We are fulfilling our duty as progressive Americans and as artists when we point out that the growing struggle of the Artists' Unions to maintain and expand the Federal Art Project is directly connected with the hopes and the cultural aspirations of the majority of our citizens. Private patronage will never bring the benefits of culture

out from the largest centers and even there, as any citizen of Chicago's South Side can attest, culture is carefully confined and restricted to the "better" sections of the city.

The Artists' Unions have taken the first steps. They have in the course of the last three years increasingly allied themselves with wide sections of the organized professional and white-collar workers. They are affiliated with the Workers Alliance of America, the national organization of unemployed and W.P.A. workers. Wherever possible the Unions have become part of the older trade union movement of the country.

On May Day, 1937, the international holiday of labor which was born out of the struggle of the American workers to establish the eight-hour day, we, the members of the Artists' Unions of America, renew and intensify our pledge to fight and to never cease fighting until the age-long separation of the masses of people from the stream of living art has been overcome. We can do no less for we know that without a nourishing and living connection with the thoughts and desires of millions of Americans, a living and vital art in America cannot be produced.

The instrument for the production of such an art is the Federal Art Project. It is true that many gains have been won through our organized strength. However, in New York City alone, 2,000 artists have registered for jobs and have been refused. Outside of New York, Chicago and a few other large cities the project is puny in size and consequently does not begin to meet the cultural requirements of the people of these communities. The services and products of the project are still to be found mainly in the places where the people must hunt diligently to find them. In spite of the brilliant achievement of the Federal Art Project we must say, "It is not enough, this is only a beginning." Although we have done much, at the present only the problems has been indicated.

The work begun must be finished. The Federal Art Project must be expanded to provide jobs for all unemployed artists. Only when this is done will the Federal Art Project be able to seriously begin to serve the needs of the people for art. We call upon the whole of America to claim that which must be theirs.

Only the closest bond between the artists and the people can establish a true democracy of culture for our country, a democracy which means, in part, the community of our ideas embodied in the concrete and lasting forms and symbols of the arts.

*Executive Committee, New York Artists' Union, National Steering Committee, Artists' Union of America*



*Cops: WILLIAM GROPPER  
Courtesy A.C.A. Gallery*



# BIG WORDS BY BIGWIGS

## What Art Officials Think About While the Artist Fights for a Permanent Project

● BY PETER VANE

ON January 17, 1934, the Honorable Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas read a speech into the Record of the Proceedings of the Congress of the United States. The speech, dealing with the subject "Public Works of Art Project," had been written by Mr. Edward Bruce, at that time the secretary to the Advisory Committee to the Treasury on Fine Arts. We quote from this speech:

"In this project a great democracy has accepted the artist as a useful member of the body politic and his art as a definite service to the state. It is, I believe, a distinct setting up of our civilization and a new conception and definition of public works—a recognition that things of culture and of the spirit contribute to the well-being of the Nation."

Thus was a statement of great historical importance read into the official record of our public life.

This statement of policy was based upon facts which had been evident for some years previous to the above date. The facts were simple. Private initiative was no longer supporting and providing the basis for the further development of the plastic and graphic arts within our country. The first result was equally simple—thousands of trained and competent artists were starving to death, some slowly, others not so slowly. Pressure was being brought to bear. The first Government Art Project, the Public Works of Art Program, was born.

It offered employment for about 3500 artists for the average period of three months at craftsmen's wages varying from \$26.50 to \$42.50 (almost immediately re-

duced to \$38.00). No organization of a permanent nature was established, as the P.W.A.P. conducted itself in the main through the existing machinery in each locality, that is, the Museums and other Art Institutions.

Although the conditions under which the work had to be done were quite bad—the limitation and uncertainty of time were the worst—on the whole the artists did an admirable job. The response of the public was enthusiastic. The Public Works of Art Program served the essential purpose of spot-lighting nationally the serious economic predicament of the artists and it proved concretely what they could do when the occasion was offered. As a last and brilliant fling, exhibitions of the work were arranged at which the spectators enthusiastically discussed the achievements of the program. These exhibitions had much in common with a wake, everyone was very busy having a good time in order to forget that the dead were present. An encouraging and slightly pious letter was sent out by Mr. Bruce to all the artists formerly employed. It was a beautiful and inspiring corpse but a corpse nevertheless.

It is our purpose here to examine the developments in Government policy in relation to the support of art since the time of this first venture. We are at this time particularly interested in the possible light which these developments may shed upon the question of making this support and encouragement of the arts a permanent aspect of Governmental function in the United States. For this reason we discuss only those phases for the present program

that offer employment to contemporary artists upon a more or less broad scale and the operation of which actually affects the entire nation. Of these, the Section of Painting and Sculpture, a division of the Public Works Branch of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, is the oldest in point of time, and is of paramount importance.

The Section of Painting and Sculpture was organized by order of the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Morgenthau, on October 16, 1934, and operates under the rules and regulations of the Procurement Division. It has the duty of taking charge of and carrying out "the work of embellishing, with paintings or sculpture, or in some cases both, the public buildings constructed by the Treasury Department" (that is for the most part, post offices, Federal court houses, hospitals, customs houses, etc.). The funds for this work are determined on the basis of a percentage (average is about 1½ per cent) of the total cost of each building to be decorated. Selection of artists is made through competitions held in various regions or on a national scale, depending upon the importance and size of the job. Once the winner has been selected, the work is executed under formal Government contract with the rate of pay ranging from \$10 to \$20 per square foot of wall space, in the case of painting. Competitions are of various kinds and the question of previous economic status of the competitor (relief or non-relief) has no reference to eligibility for competition. Salaries are paid only to the Administration personnel.

Although all phases of the present Gov-



ernment support of art may be said to have grown out of the first venture, the Public Works of Art Program, the Section of Painting and Sculpture has the most direct connection, particularly in respect to the administrators involved. It stems from essentially the same political sources as were directly involved in the first program, its political base in the Treasury Department, and it represents the ideas of this group as to the correct and most suitable form of Government support for art over any length of time. With few exceptions, and these few hold only minor jobs in the Section, the entire personnel of the Section is exactly the same as that of the National Office of the Public Works of Art Program.

*Who are these people?*

Mr. Edward Bruce, consulting expert and special assistant to the Director of Procurement, who established and actually runs the Section by virtue of his brains and, his connections. Bruce is a Harvard man, a corporation lawyer who was for many years involved in American enterprise in the Philippines, where he owned the Manila Times, a newspaper, and in China, where, "as President of the Pacific Development Company he promoted and organized our trade with the Orient." He is further known in international financial circles as an expert on silver; in fact he was sent to the London Economic Conference as the United States Government expert in this field. In 1932 he went to Washington to "represent" former clients in the "solution of the practical issue of Philippine independence" (you might call this lobbying).

He realized an ambition of his youth by becoming a professional painter at the age of forty, sacrificing a "number of tempting offers in the banking world" to go to Italy where he studied with Maurice Sterne in Anticoli Corrado. He is well known as a painter and we might add, has been quite successful financially in this field of endeavor. As might be guessed from the foregoing, his political connections are of the best, touching the Cabinet level.

There is not room for much more than the above in one relatively small Government section so it can be safely said that the rest of the section's administrators are quite pleasant and nominally inoffensive people who may roughly be classified under the category of "Bruce's 'Fair Haired Boys'." They are as follows:

Mr. Forbes Watson, critic and former editor of the Arts Magazine, a man who knows a good phrase when he sees one and who, for one thing, is entrusted with the delicate work of repelling the "insolent" suggestions which have been made from time to time by various organizations of



*Evening Meal: DAN RICO*  
Courtesy Federal Art Project

artists. He is particularly fond of the Artists Unions and is known officially as Technical Advisor to the Section and Editor of the Bulletin sent out to the artists.

Mr. Edward Rowan, Superintendent of the Section, about whom we have no information, but we are convinced he is working for his living.

Mr. Olin Dows, Chief of the Treasury Relief Art Project, a subsidiary part of the Section operating on W.P.A. funds and employing artists from the Relief rolls. This subsidiary is now in the process of liquidation and the artists employed on it are to be transferred to the Federal Art Project of the W.P.A. This step marks the final break of the Section and its personnel with any aspect of the Art Projects connected with the work relief program. Mr. Dows, a scion of a wealthy Washington family, was only converted to the idea that relief for artists is a good thing through the medium of an artists delegation about a year ago. He is reputed to have expressed his distaste for the business of requesting funds necessary to pay the artists working under his administration. It seems he had never found himself in the ridiculous and ungenteel position of having to ask for money before and his resentment knew no end. He paints.

Last, but not least, we have that unknown quantity, the Fine Arts Commission, which seems to have something to say about the work that is approved for the Section and in addition the Director of Procurement himself, Admiral C. J. Peoples,

whose official personal approval of the work is necessary before a contract may be let for the execution of any sketch.

Under more or less normal circumstances we would not bring the personal characteristics and the past history of any group of art officials to the attention of our readers. However, in the instance of the Section of Painting and Sculpture, the personal convictions and ideas of an extremely small group, under the exclusive domination of Mr. Edward Bruce, seem to be the determining factor in regard to the policy of one of the most important phases of the Governments' art program. This program is financed through the use of public funds and the entire nation has been asked and encouraged to support it unconditionally. This is reason enough for a close examination. However, we must add to this the repeated assertion made by the officials of the Section, that it is the "Government's one permanent section of painting and sculpturing." We have assumed, along with the rest of the country, that the question of the form and character of Permanent Government support of art was still to be decided. As a matter of fact, we have had much to say on this in the past and as yet we have not received any official notice that the Government had accepted even the principle of offering such permanent support. More on this later. Let us examine the ideas and actual operation of the Section in relation to the problem of supplying and building, through public channels, a vital and growing art for America.

Mr. Bruce, in speaking before the Committee on Patents, House of Representatives, 74th Congress, in relation to the question of establishing a proposed Department of Science, Art and Literature within the Federal Government said the following in the course of his general endorsement of Government encouragement of the Sciences and Arts.

"One of the things which we should consider is how we can enrich the lives of our people with things of cultural and artistic interest. Boredom is one of the worst ills of humanity, *and the thing that breeds most discontent.* With the movement toward shorter working hours we will have more leisure, and I am an ardent believer in the *need for the Government* to assume leadership in *supplying interest and activities* which will fill this leisure and add to the *peoples happiness.*" (Our italics.) Then, after stating that the imposition of the Federal Income Tax (so nicely evaded by Mr. Morgan, for instance) was a large factor in the failure of wealthy individuals to give further support to art and citing this as the reason for Government support, Mr. Bruce spoke briefly of the horrors of



unemployment among the young people of America. He said, "Either we of the older generations are going to help them (the youth) solve this problem (unemployment) or face the issue of having what we built up destroyed by tragic experiments along untried paths—*Conditions like those existing today breed the kind of a spirit that revolutions are made of.*" (Our italics.) For these reasons, Mr. Bruce was in favor of Government encouragement to science, literature and art.

The voice was the voice of Bruce, but the words are the perfect embodiment of the social ideas of the Silver Magnates. Boredom is the chief social menace to the welfare of the American people and art, *art at the expense of these same people mind you*, is a salve to relieve that boredom in order that it may not result in discontent. In token of our respect for this profound analysis of social events by Mr. Bruce, we extend the commiseration of our readers to the hundreds of thousands of automobile workers who suddenly and simultaneously became so bored with their jobs of chasing a few nuts and bolts up and down the racing "line" that they, well you know, just ups and sat down, out of sheer boredom. And then, fancy it, from more and accumulated boredom demanded that the boss recognize their union and pay them enough wages to feed their families. On the basis of Mr. Bruce's statements we must also assume that the mob of vigilantes who attacked sit-down strikers in the Hershey plant in Pennsylvania were motivated by reason of excessive and intolerable ennui. We would suggest that Mr. Hershey and others of his stripe send the thugs to the movies instead, after this. As for the youth, they must be given pictures to look at which will impress upon them what a wonderful and cultured nation they have the honor to have been born into and thus, miraculously, will their stomachs become full and their minds content. We are being mild and charitable as we label these words of Mr. Bruce reactionary and anti-democratic, as displaying contempt of the crassest kind for the American people and for their rights as citizens of a great country supposedly a democracy in the full sense of that word.

Has this attitude reflected itself in the Sections dealings with the artists? Let Mr. Rowan speak. "In looking over work submitted to our Section by aspiring muralists, I can't but recall the experience of Harriet Monroe in relation to a sister art. Miss Monroe, as the editor of Poetry, looked forward to the result of a national competition which her magazine conducted two years ago for the World's Fair Poem. A couple of good poems were received—but of the other contestants Miss Monroe has

said, 'I wonder if they thought they were writing poetry.'" The implication of this is clear.

Despite the elaborate set up of various and sundry advisory and local committees the "catholic taste" of the officials of the Section itself ultimately is the factor which determines what subjects shall be treated and how. We have no space here to discuss in detail the work which has been done under the Section but we can repeat a consensus of informed opinion has characterized the work generally as dangerously near an official academic standard.

Nor are the artists to be blamed for this for they are, as a whole, quite aware of the working of the so-called "catholicism of taste" which pervades the inner sanctum of the Section. This taste acts as a vice which, under the guise of securing work of sufficiently high quality to adorn state buildings (page the Procurement Division's rules), actually squeezes out of the work submitted every vestige of living content or attempts to achieve vital and new forms. We could cite a variety of well known artists whose work has been emasculated in this way.

There are many reasons why the Section of Painting and Sculpture must not be allowed to assume upon itself or to actually become the only permanent phase of Government support. First, it does not and never can offer any security of employment to the artists of America because it does not provide them with a job but only the chance of winning one for a short period. Secondly, even on the basis of a recently expanded program, it will offer opportunities for employment to only 500 artists a year. If we compare this figure with the 5300 employed by the Federal Art Project and add to that the total of thousands of artists who are still on relief and without jobs, we have a minimum figure which already exposes the utter inadequacy of the Section as far as solving the employment problem among the artists. On the basis of the above reasons alone, the establishment of the Section of Painting and Sculpture as the *only permanent* government program of support of art would be ridiculous and essentially a subterfuge which would gloss over the entire problem. But there is another angle which must be considered. The exclusive permanency of the Section would constitute a blow to developing *progressive American culture* of the most serious kind.

In the instance of such a situation we could expect an intensification of bureaucratic control of the Section by its present administration. There is no reason at the present time to believe anything but that such a permanent art program could be

delivered into the hands of the worst reactionaries who would use it, not only to control the artists as a group, but likewise to make the American people "content" with their lot.

The Permanent Art Project in America must not become a nest of social and artistic reaction, which can, through the economic enslavement of the artists, effect the enslavement of their social and artistic ideas and by so doing, aid and abet the aims of the reactionaries toward the people of our country. If this is allowed, then the ignominious end of the free and full development of the plastic and graphic arts in America is in sight. Only a real and free exchange between the artists and the grand total of our citizens, to be accomplished on the basis of a democratically controlled Government Art Program, can assure this development. The Section of Painting and Sculpture decidedly lacks this potentiality for a proper and democratic function.

The Section will not become the "Government's Permanent Art Program" unless the dictates of ordinary reason and democratic procedure are completely overridden in the solution of this problem. The artists are emphatically opposed to this as being against their interests and those of art in our country. Those citizens who are informed are likewise opposed and additional thousands will, upon reading this article, share this sentiment. We have not nor will we, reach that point of defeat which would deliver a Permanent Government Program for Art into the hands of a small clique, dominated by reactionary ideas and methods of procedure which have brought into the workings of the Section a small and malodorous group of

(Continued on page 26)



Head: HERBERT KALLEM



# HELP SPAIN!

By Andre Malraux

**T**HIS farewell dinner is a Victory Dinner.\* At the moment when the Estramaduran peasants are attacking Toledo, at the moment when the beaten Italian army is abandoning the Aragon road, the State Department of the United States has withdrawn the prohibition against lending medical aid to Spain. I was at the hospital in Valencia the day that the first American ambulance arrived and I heard the whirr of their motors drown out the moans of the wounded. It is good that writers and artists have their share of responsibility here. It is good that they have contributed to raising the swelling voice in the United States, in the joyous cries of first victories, so that this swelling tide of democratic voices may be the roar which comes from the other side of the ocean to muffle the dull noise of human suffering.

I remember the night of Carabanchel. Since the Talavera battle the Moors had not been repulsed a single time; they were now at the very gates. The wind was blowing from the direction of Madrid toward Carabanchel and one couldn't hear the slightest war noises—only the peasants of the suburbs were moving in compact masses towards the Puerto del Sol and the trucks, loaded with young folks most meagerly armed, barely armed at all, were moving up to the front lines. The Government had evacuated all those men and women potentially fitted for organizational work. The Spanish Alliance of Anti-fascist Writers, organized three months before the insurrection, had received its parting orders. I was walking in the opposite direction of the crowd with the President of the Alliance, Jose Bergamin and its Secretary, Maria Teresa Leon. They had decided to remain, come what might. A delegate of the Ministry of Public Education had come to tell them this: "The liberation of Spain is not a question of geography; whosoever can still help Spain must help her wherever she be—at Valencia or elsewhere—and not remain here to be killed." And Bergamin pointed to the masses of the people who were going down toward the

center of Madrid in the night and said to me: "When a writer has defended these people before the war, no reason of a practical nature can allow him to let them die without his standing by them where the greatest danger exists." We walked together

for more than an hour before I went back to the aviation field and when we separated—both of us thinking that it was without a doubt for the last time—Bergamin said to me: "Naturally it's hard; and what about the question of the women and



On Sunday afternoon, April 18, the membership of the New York Union wound up the first phase of its activity for the aid of Spanish Democracy. At a meeting held in the Hippodrome Theatre in New York City the Union presented a four passenger, fully equipped ambulance to the Medical Bureau and the representative of the Spanish people, Ambassador Fernando de los Rios. The members had worked with such enthusiasm that it was possible at this meeting to make an additional donation of \$1,000.00 in cash.

Former President of the Union, Phil Bard, recently returned from Spain, where he served as a member of the Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigade, addressed the meeting. The New York Union is proud of its 35 members who are in Spain fighting for the cause of peace and democracy. The New York Union considers that it has only begun to aid Spain. *Photo shows (left to right), Mr. Samuel Guy Inman, Chairman of the Hippodrome Meeting, Dr. Walter B. Cannon of the Harvard Medical School, Chairman of the Medical Bureau, Mr. Ben Miller Chairman of the Spanish Committee, New York Union, Chet LaMore, who presented the ambulance for the Union. Photo by Yavno, Staff Photographer.*

\* Speech at the Send-Off Banquet for the Artists and Writers Ambulance Corps.



children?" The siege began that very night and Madrid is not yet taken. But if Madrid has resisted, it is perhaps because so many men were determined to remain there or to die.

War nights are full of madmen and of heroes. A little while before meeting Bergamin I had been following a man in the streets of Madrid who was trundling a scroll-like manuscript as long as he was tall. One rarely writes on paper of such large format and such a tremendous manuscript was bound to interest any writer. I stopped the passer-by. "What on earth is this manuscript you have?" "It's not a manuscript," he answered gently, "I'm just changing the paper in my apartment."

It is the right of every writer to change the paper in his apartment during nights when perhaps the destiny of the world is being changed. It is possible that his books will for all that be neither better or worse; it is possible that it were better for him not to demand the same attitude of others and it were better that he do not forget that the respect which surrounds writers and artists in this world comes more from those who for centuries have entered the fray rather than from those who have remained on the side-lines. And certainly he cannot forget that the respect which will later on be the portion of the Spanish writers will be theirs above all because the death of their greatest poet Garcia Lorca added to the age-old spirit of courage. "Intelligence," said Nietzsche, who was well qualified to speak on the subject, "Intelligence is, in the final analysis, without doubt a question of courage."

At this hour when so many apartments in this world are having their paper changed in vain, I thank you in the name of the Spanish writers and artists who, each one in his own domain, are putting to the acid test of action their beliefs; I thank you for helping make it possible to whitewash the walls of the wretched hovels of Spanish peasants, which means making it possible to cleanse away the fresh traces of blood.

It's not so easy as one might think to picture war. So far from easy that often those who discover it can't stand it. Many scenes of the bombardment of Madrid have been filmed. When one of these films, formed of a montage of documentary pictures, was presented in France, the audience found itself witnessing this scene: A block of houses has just been demolished by the bombs of Fascist planes. The first aid service is excavating from the debris, one by one, objects of all sorts—pulling out a chair by its back, a piece of table by its leg; they then pass along the line a small package which they hold in their hands by the middle. Behind them, last in

the receiving line, is a woman who receives this package with the terrifying century-old gesture of motherhood; she takes and presses it in her arms. The package is a child. But the head which rests on her left arm does not hold up. It falls back with its eyes closed in full view of the camera with the unsought-for effect of a close-up; the child is dead. No French audience could stand this scene, but the democratic French Government can stand having this scene repeat itself day in and day out. Artists, if your business is to teach men to love, it is also to teach them to open their eyes and see.

The children must be evacuated. They can't be evacuated as long as the Pediatrics Service is not organized. The Medical Bureau is at the present time busy organizing this service. The Spanish Alliance of Anti-Fascist Writers is busying itself in preparing for the perfect functioning of this service in Spain.

You are all familiar with the critical battle of Valley Forge in the American Revolution and the turning point in the Civil War, the battle of Gettysburg; and certain of you remember the time when Soviet Russia consisted of no more territory than the former Moscovite duchy. The generals conquered everywhere. In two years of civil war in Russia the Russian people hadn't carried away a single military victory, and yet it is the Russian peasants who today live peacefully in Siberia. But Kolchak was to encounter more than an enemy army against him: the organization of the peasants in revolt. Kolchak had promised

land to the peasants as he had also promised it to his underwriters, the landlords. At harvest time he had to choose. Generals never choose the peasants; Franco promised land to the peasants and to the landlords who are paying him. Harvest time in Spain comes in the month of July.

When a man receives bullet wounds in the arm (machine-gun wounds generally consist of four bullet-holes), his wounds are treated by having a gauze dressing passed *through* each wound. With anaesthetics this is of no import. Without anaesthetics, the wound must be slowly re-opened each day; the man is literally re-wounded daily. When I left there were practically no anaesthetics. The terrible thing *now* is not being wounded; the terrible thing is being *treated* for one's wounds.

*I saw the first American ambulances of the Medical Bureau in Spain. They are admirably equipped. We must not wait until that which is unorganized becomes fit for action; we must not wait until the Red Cross, which has done nothing for seven months for us, begins to function as a Medical Aid organization. We must utilize what is ready to be used NOW. Men are suffering each hour of each day. The American people must send x-ray plates and anaesthetics to the American Ambulance Corps because THEY ARE THERE NOW. We will make it known to all combatants that they may and should telephone to the Americans whenever it is necessary. This is simple; it depends only on you; it must be done AT ONCE.*



*Piece Worker: PAUL BURLIN  
From Artists Congress New York Exhibition*



# A Project for the People<sup>\*</sup>

BY ROBERT GODSOE

I feel that a deep note of very gratifying solidarity between the Artists Union and the Supervisors Association has been struck during these last six months, that our concerted action and similar attitudes on Art Project matters have constituted something of tremendous significance in labor circles. Somervell has said supervisors urge workers into organizational activity. Engelhorn says that the Supervisors Association takes orders from the Artists Union and the C.P.C. Nowhere has it occurred to the Administration that supervisors might be workers and act under given circumstances as workers would act.

We are fighting the same fight, our interests are the same, and we are harried and oppressed as are the workers on our project. This inevitable solidarity must be strengthened and continued. I believe we should send each other speakers. I believe we should know more about each other.

I am happy to tell you that the Supervisors' Association has enrolled eighty out of the ninety supervisors on the Federal Art Project, and that only one Managing Project Supervisor out of fifteen has thus far refused to join us. This strength is being utilized to the same ends as is the strength of the Artists Union. We therefore can afford to work for an even closer solidarity of intention and attitude.

The primary purpose of my visit is to speak with you about the Public Use of Art Committee and its intensely important program. As Supervisor of Exhibitions for the States of New York and New Jersey, in charge of a project which has designed and delivered to the public over 500 exhibitions of art work during the last twelve months—a task which has become routine and at moments tedious—I cannot help but be stimulated by something which will infuse new blood into this intensive program. The idea was all yours and your committee

has carried out its program with amazing success. I had no realization that the idea of sending out art exhibitions to trade unions could ever be made to meet the approval of the administration. Too often have valid, and, to my way of thinking, important ideas been scrapped, because of administrative policy. But your committee through most diligent effort has successfully passed this barrier and I may receive and honor requests for exhibitions of project work from trade unions, industrial centers, workers' organizations. I hope that I will soon be able to report that factories and business houses are requesting exhibitions.

I do not believe that it is necessary to speak of the cultural importance of these exhibitions. If you had not been aware of this angle of the matter you would not have called this program into being. But I will speak, with your permission, of the ramifications of this matter of Public Use of Art which may to some of us be not too clearly defined.

You have gained a great victory in

forcing a program which will permit you a vastly enlarged liberty in the expression of your own ideology in your Project assignments. The vacuities which one felt called upon to turn in when the project was first created have been set aside. You can paint what you see and what you know and what you feel about it with the full knowledge that through your own efforts you have brought to light a hitherto untouched field for consumption.

Like most unsuccessful gallery owners in this time, I am certain that the old gallery regime is over because it suffered a bad case of stiffening of the arteries. With a concretely new point of view in the creation of works of art, a concretely new method of exposure had to be called into being. I think you have done this with eminent success.

But, having created your very apparent demand, you must not let your consumer go begging. It is a grievous matter to report that you are not turning in enough paintings of a suitable nature for use in trade union exhibitions. More of you must take and execute assignments from your Public Use of Art Committee. At the moment I have upon my desk, brought me by your committee, requests for exhibitions from Musicians Union Local 802, three exhibitions for the Dressmakers Union, a running request for a series of shows for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Writers Union. Others are coming in daily. I do not have enough paintings of a suitable nature to carry on this program.

Concretely, I have to suggest to you that you realize how significant this movement is, what it is doing to spread a consciousness of art as human statement—that, realizing this, you give the art project far more of what you have always wanted to give it, and that you wage a strenuous campaign for the enlargement of the easel project. I can book twice as many shows as I am now booking. We have the facilities for carrying them out. But we must have more paintings for exhibition because allocations to tax-supported buildings and regular shipments to Washington so drain the supply of works in the project as to make it necessary to reject requests for exhibitions for the want of enough work to show.

If it be true that Holger Cahill says exhibitions are the most important function of the project, then we must have more paintings to put into exhibitions. We must—and I trust you will see the significance of the point—demand of the project that paintings be exhibited before they are allocated. It has always seemed strange to me that Washington makes its selection from our stockrooms first, that from the remainder we make allocations, and that



*Big Business: DOROTHEA GREENBAUM  
From the Artists Congress New York Exhibition*

<sup>\*</sup> Speech delivered to the New York Artists Union.



after both selections have been made—after the crop has been well picked—I may, if various committees agree, choose from what is left, paintings by which the project is to be represented in its most important function—exhibitions. The procedure must be reversed. From the total supply of paintings exhibitions must be

picked first. Allocations and the regular assignments can follow afterwards. Paintings that have been exhibited can be allocated later and perhaps with more facility because of public attention which has accrued to them. But paintings cannot be exhibited after they have been allocated.

I think if you will fight for an enlarged

Easel Project on the grounds that exhibition demands far exceed production and will fight to have all paintings exhibited before they are allocated, and will give us more of the work for which trade unions are asking, you will be carrying out the next logical steps in your campaign for the public use of art.



## MY FATHER REMINISCES

I relate briefly a few important events in the life of a Garment Worker, beginning with the immigration influx of 1890-1900, through a long, weary, nightmarish existence during the sweatshop period never to have lost faith in the ultimate attainment of a Garment Workers Union.

I depict the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire; the barred doors and windows (the boss's privilege at that time), which resulted in death to more than 100 women workers.

The trio are the callous manufacturer, jobber and contractor.

Slogans note a few important successful strikes which gave impetus to unioniza-

tion activities.

A fragment of a garment pattern with basting stitches is the background for the extreme righthand portion of the print.

My Father says, "No history will ever be able to fully describe how much we have suffered. It is wonderful to realize that workers have brought about so many advantageous changes! There is still so very much work for us to do!"

This lithograph was produced under the Federal Art Project, for trade union distribution, a field opened through the efforts of the Public Use of Art Committee of the Artists' Union.

Ida Abelman



# Preface to the Congress Show

BY LYND WARD

THE artist of our time has been inevitably and profoundly affected by two events in the world outside—the Great War of 1914 and the economic crisis that began in 1929. Into the quiet of the studio these forces beat with the fury of a storm, and the artist found that despite his desires for peace and isolation, he could not remain untouched.

From the war he learned that the world of art, seemingly complete and self-sufficient and impervious to the winds that blow through other places, is in reality a structure so frail that it takes but the insatiate ambition of military men, the desire of industrialists to increase their profits, or the blunt intention of bankers to protect their loans, to send it tumbling to destruction—the sculpture of the Renaissance crumbled beneath airplane bombardment, the paintings of four hundred years ripped to pieces by artillery, the living artists of a country riddled with bullets like any other men and left hanging on barbed wire entanglements.

From the great depression he has learned that even in times of peace the foundations of the world of art are not secure; that an economic system that brings unemployment, hunger and suffering to millions brings a full measure of death and sickness to the world of art; that the meagre patronage on which he eked out an existence in "good" times can virtually vanish in "hard" times; that his world is not a world in itself; that a thousand threads bind the artist to his fellow men.

The artist has learned, too, that those who control the state and boast themselves the guardians of civilization have, in the final analysis, no real concern for him; that if left to their own devices and programs they will cast him off to starve, and ask only that he do it without protest. These things have been made overwhelmingly clear to the artist in the years since 1929.

But the artist has learned other things, too. He has come to see that if he wants the world of art to live, he must work actively for those physical conditions that are basic necessities for any art activity, an economic relationship with society that will provide a room to work in, food for energy, ample supplies of canvas, colors, materials. The old order has demonstrated that by and large and for most artists it cannot supply

these physical conditions. Hence the artist seeks new relationships, federal projects and patronage, new uses for art, new places for pictures, new audiences, wider audiences, audiences sought for and created through rearrangements in the fields of content and prices. He sees, too, that if he wants the world of art to live, he must fight for something beyond these physical conditions. That something is freedom, not just an abstraction or a world in a song, but with a very precise meaning. The artist must have complete freedom of expression, freedom to deal with any aspect of life without hindrance. He must be free to bring his work before people without the barriers that rise from official censorship, attacks by hoodlums and vigilantes, or prohibitive costs of materials and display space. He must have an audience that is in its turn free, not bound down by taboos and superstitions or kept from contact with art by barriers of another sort, lack of education, lack of leisure, lack of money to buy and to own.

These, then, are the things the American artist has learned about the world and about himself. Understanding has brought with it the compulsion to act. Because alone he can do nothing, because, moreover, the conditions he wants are for all artists, not for a special group or clique, a new kind of artists' organization was needed. To meet this need the American Artists' Congress was formed somewhat over a year ago.

It joins artists of all races and aesthetic creeds in common action whose goal is the creation of those conditions that art must have if it is to live and grow. In the larger sense, this common action means complete and passionate opposition to those forces in the world about us that are moving toward another war, that seek to repeat the bitter formula wherein lust for power and privilege and desire for business profits work bloody havoc with the lives of millions. More specifically, this common action means opposing all censorships of what artists may paint and all attacks on what they have painted, whether these attacks take the form of physical injury to the work, as occurred in Los Angeles, or attempts to suppress the exhibition of a particular painting, as happened in St. Louis, and Rockford, Illinois. It means vigorous support of government art

projects, since these projects, regardless of what immediate reasons impelled their establishment, represent the most significant step towards a sound economic base for art that has occurred in this country. It means working out new relationships with the public, as was done in the Congress exhibition of graphic art shown simultaneously in thirty cities all over the country. It means working with all other groups whose goals are similar to the goals the artist seeks, whose enemies are the enemies of the living artist, who are fighting restrictions on civil liberties, who seek a higher standard of living for the workers of the country, who want more freedom and a more abundant life for the people of this land. With all who walk this road, the artist makes common cause, and this exhibition, because it springs from the deep desire of artists for a world in which there shall be both peace and freedom, is in itself a voice against war and against fascism, and a force for the advancement of culture.

## EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

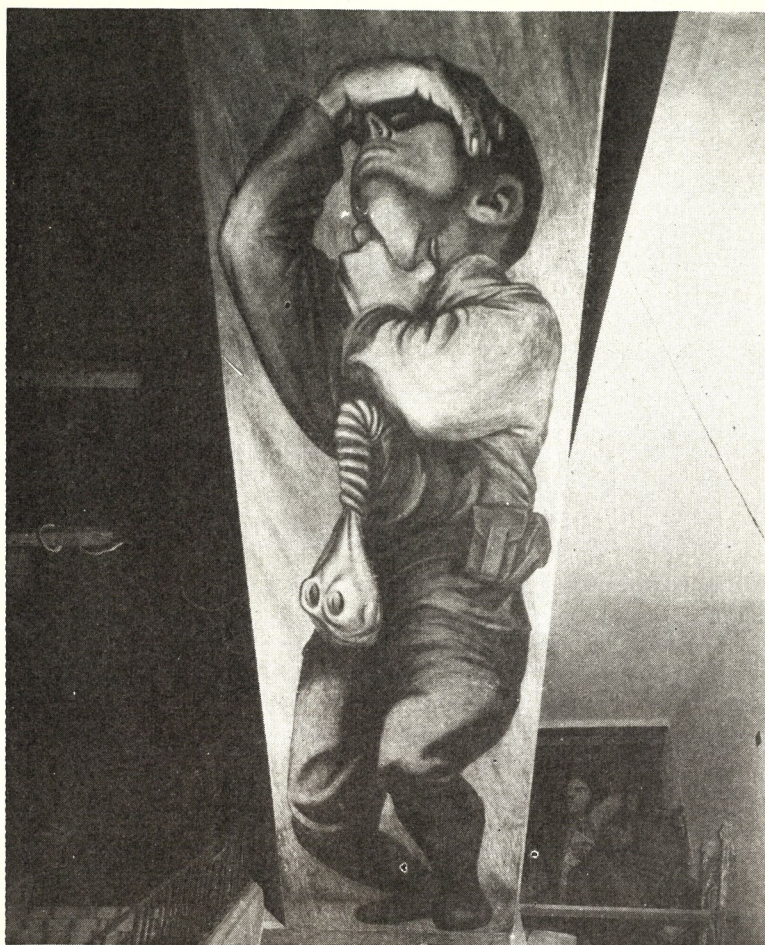
The editors of ART FRONT are pleased to bring to your special attention the article of Mr. Peter Vane, "Big Words by Bigwigs." We are confident that you will agree with us that this article, including, as it does, studies of various persons prominently in official government art circles, will have the effect of airing the official American art scene somewhat. This, we are happy to announce, is but the first of a series of articles which will probe into the mysterious byways of our art world and will, we trust, serve to illuminate the activities of not so few of our more refined and artistic reactionaries.

The next issue of ART FRONT will carry an article dealing more in detail with the actual operation of the competitions of the Section of Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department.

We are pleased to announce that the following have consented to act as contributing editors to ART FRONT: E. M. Benson, associate editor, *American Magazine of Art*; Grace Clements, executive secretary of the California Branch of the American Artists Congress; Stuart Davis, national executive secretary, American Artists Congress; Margaret Duroc, critic; Angel Flores, editor of the Critics Group; Jerome Klein, critic of the *N. Y. Post*; Louis Lozowick, artist and critic; Joe Solman, former editor of ART FRONT; Samuel Putnam, author, translator and critic; Ralph Pearson, artist and critic. England: F. D. Klingender and A. L. Lloyd, critics and members of the Artists' International Association. Mexico: Juan de la Fuente, corresponding secretary of the L.E.A.R.



*"Gas Attack," detail from the first trade union mural in Mexico was executed for the entrance hall of the new building of the Telleras Graficos de la Nacion (the Printers Unions) in Mexico City. Completed in pure fresco in November, 1936, it is the collective work of four noted painters: Leopoldo Mendez, Paul O'Higgins, Alfredo Zalce and Fernando Gamboa. The mural originated in a competition organized by the LEAR at the suggestion of Ortiz Hernan, Director of Telleras Graficas.*



# The Mexican Congress Reports

**T**HE first National Congress of the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists of Mexico recently held in Mexico City evoked an enormous response in Mexico and in Latin America. Workers and intellectuals considered it an event of prime importance in the cultural and political history of Mexico. Eight hundred and ninety delegates signed the call. Over five hundred delegates came in person, including representatives from Cuba, Peru, and the United States. The congress was actively supported by the Mexican government. President Cardenas sent General Luis I. Rodriguez, his secretary, to officially inaugurate the congress. Among other important Mexican officials participating in the sessions held in the Palace of Fine Arts were: Chavez Orozco, Assistant Secretary of Education; Gilberto Bosques, head of the press department of the National Revolutionary Party (P.N.R.) Hernan La-

borde, Secretary of the Communist Party of Mexico as well as governors of several Mexican states, and the best known Mexican writers, artists, musicians, architects, sculptors, pedagogues and other intellectuals. Presiding at the meetings was Silvestre Revueltas, Mexico's foremost composer, and the President of L.E.A.R.

Among the foreign delegates who spoke were: Juan Marinello, famous Cuban writer, who suffered imprisonment under both Machado and Batista; Nicolas Guillen, popular Haitian poet; Joseph Freeman, editor of the *New Masses* and delegate of the League of American Writers; and Waldo Frank, whose speech was given the place of honor on the program.

The work of the entire congress was devoted to the problems arising out of the contemporary political situation and the twofold peril of imperialistic war and fascism. In the seven days the congress

met, Spain was the chief issue of discussion and every public session ended in a great demonstration in favor of the Spanish people.

The six points of the call (published in our February issue) were each debated singly at six general meetings, while the actual work of the congress was carried on in private commissions. These were divided into sections on plastic arts, science, literature, music, education, theatre and the film. A report of these proceedings is now being published in book form.

The last public meeting of the congress held in the theatre of the Palace of Fine Arts was addressed by Marcelino Domingo, former Minister of Education under Azana and now special envoy of the Spanish government to Mexico, and by Senor Ordaz, the present Spanish Ambassador. Their dramatic appeal for aid and support to Spain brought the entire audience to its feet in a spontaneous ovation for the Loyalist government.

The final resolutions drafted by the permanent committee and unanimously adopted by the congress were:

1. the organization of a unified trade union of intellectual workers corresponding to the Confederation of the Workers of Mexico (CTM) with which the LEAR is directly affiliated. This union to include craft locals for writers and artists.

2. the building of a LEAR cultural centre with living quarters for members to be called the House of Intellectuals.

3. the creation of a publishing house on the basis of the LEAR program to be called, New Mexico.

4. the calling of an international congress of intellectuals to meet in Mexico City in November of this year to build the cultural front against War and Fascism. Work on this congress, which will be an event of world importance, is now under way.

The plastic arts division of the congress was by far the largest and most important section in the congress. Divided into committees, discussions were held on murals, graphic arts, photography, caricature, and architecture. In addition, the LEAR held an exhibition of art in the Palace of Fine Arts, at which the work of such prominent artists as Orozco, Leopoldo Mendez, Santos Balmori, Paul O'Higgins, Kitagawa, Covarrubias, Carlos Merida, Castellanos, Alfredo Zalce, Fernando Gamboa, Roberto Montenegro and others was shown. Joe Jones, delegate of the American Artists Congress, and Leopoldo Mendez spoke at the opening reception.

Resolutions proposed and adopted during the commissions of the plastic arts included the following:

1. To create a new and truly significant



art by a process of its integration with the interests of the great masses of the workers, for any art that lives off the bounty of the bourgeoisie can serve this class alone, and every lone-wolf effort, with its incomplete values, is foredestined to failure.

2. To tighten the bonds that link *artists* with the working class, through the trade union organizations and those others which are engaged in a people's struggle, nationally and internationally, from the standpoint of their common interests.

3. To integrate art in the service of the revolutionary struggle, and to make a scientific analysis of the technical and formal processes used in the Plastic Arts throughout history, as well as the processes made available by modern industrial science, with a view to utilizing such knowledge in order to further the movement of integration and satisfy its (technical) requirements.

4. To unite the artists of Mexico in a body in accordance with the principles of revolutionary ideology implicit in the present struggle, which, at bottom, is aimed against fascism, imperialism and war; and to organize, on the basis of a trade-union aimed at safeguarding their professional interests.

5. To line up the artists of Mexico in solidarity with the struggles carried on by artists in other countries on behalf of their political and economic demands.

This plan means that the artists must:

1. Work toward the formation of a body of professional teachers of the Plastic Arts in education, in order to provide security for the creative artists.

2. Demand of the State Governments a budget allowance adequate for large-scale planning of mural paintings adapted to the cities' needs, for each of the State capitals and for such other places where the art of painting can fulfil its social function.

3. Demand a budget allowance adequate for the protection of such plastic means of expression as easel paintings, for the purpose of having them circulate by means of traveling exhibitions.

4. Demand that a permanent exhibition gallery be provided, in a convenient location, properly planned in its principles by architects and technicians who are specialists in the field.

5. Demand a budget allowance adequate for publication on a large scale, for popular use, of books on painting, drawing, engraving and photography, which will convey a clear message to all sectors of the working people.

6. Demand a budget adequate for providing and maintaining a professional plastic arts shop, which, in consonance with revolutionary programs, shall pro-

mote the development of artists among the youth of Mexico.

7. Demand of the proper official body the performance of the now pending painting contract, not alone as a demand from the artists under contract but also on behalf of Mexican artists in general.

8. Demand of the Secretary of Public Education that he reconstitute the National Council of Fine Arts under the prevailing presidential agreement, so that it may see to better organization and closer supervision of the official work performed in connection with the various art projects subject to the Department of Fine Arts.

And demand at the same time that the budget of the said Department be increased.

And demand of the President and the Secretary of Education the immediate removal of the present head of the Department of Fine Arts, Mr. José Muños Cota, by reason of his proved ignorance of the

technical aspect of art and lack of vision respecting its application on a national scale; as well as his absolute lack of understanding of the specific problems relating to art in education and his deliberate purpose of hampering the trade-union organizations of that Department as well as the revolutionary artists' organizations.

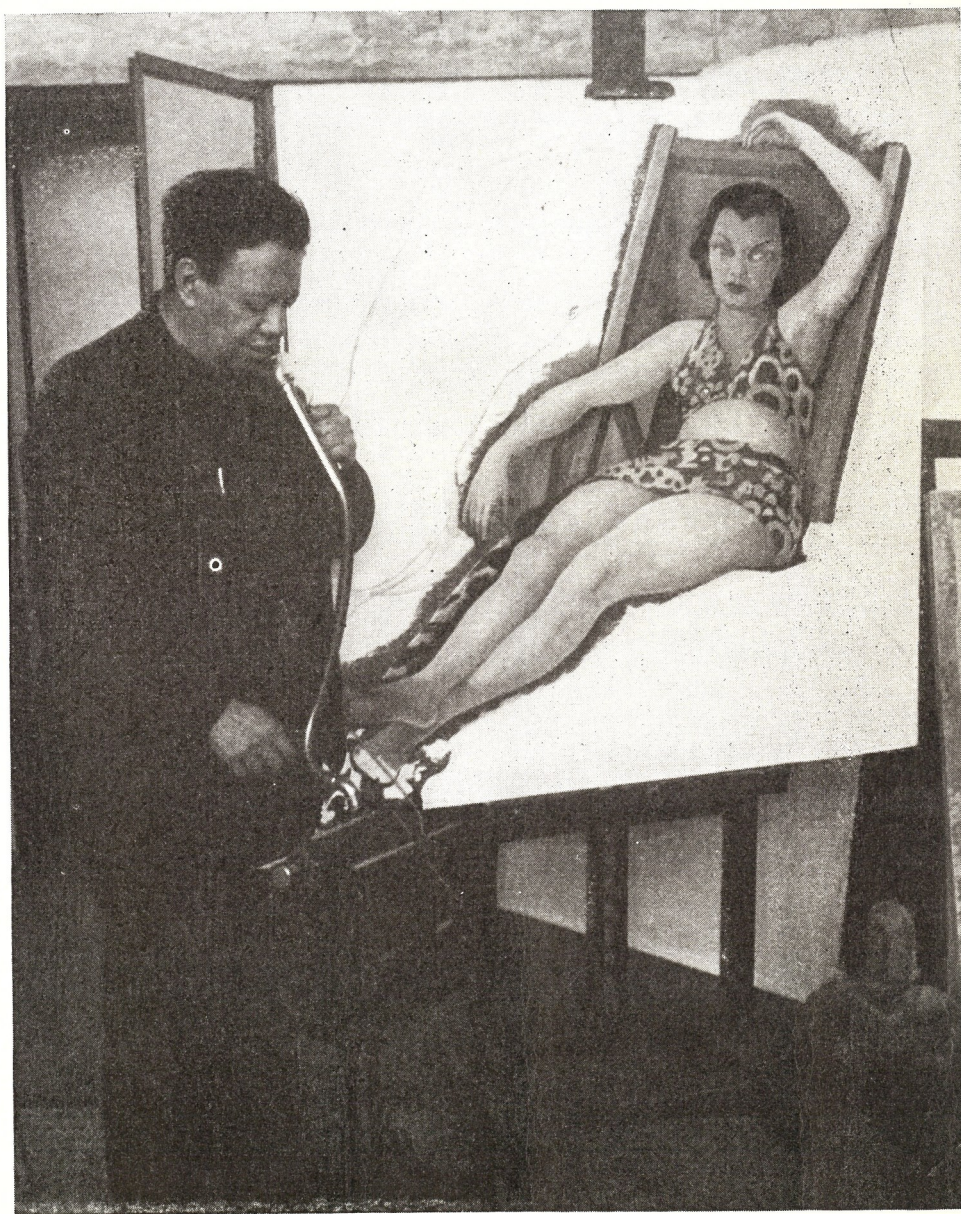
#### *Relations with the Workers*

1. Demand a corresponding contribution by the working class organized in revolutionary trade unions by way of moral and economic support of an art that serves its class interests.

2. Organize exhibitions in the trade-union halls and the peasant centers.

3. Set up permanent stalls for the sale of popular books, paintings, engravings, drawings and photographs.

4. Arrange for the decoration of trade-union halls and enter into contracts for the sale of pictures to the trade-unions.



*"I Oppose the People's Front" Dictates* DIEGO RIVERA



# NATIONAL NEWS AT A GLANCE

## CHICAGO

The Chicago Union has just announced its affiliation with the A. F. of L. This is the result of close cooperation with the trade union movement in Chicago. Further details, not available now, will appear in the next issue of ART FRONT.

The Union expresses its stand in regard to the present status of the rental policy issue in the following statement:

"Chicago artists who have supported the rental boycott during the past twelve months will join the action of the National Artists Groups who have recently rescinded boycott clause of rental policy.

"The Artist Union of Chicago, however, hereby reaffirms its belief in the principle involved and will continue its efforts to assure fair compensation for the public service which exhibiting artists render Chicago by making possible popular exhibitions at the Chicago Art Institute."

The Chicago Union takes the standing award when it comes to bulletins. The three-page bulletin it issues to its membership is the finest we have seen yet. Neatly printed and with a swell layout, it reads fluently and is well illustrated. The New York Union is green with envy. Why not write to the Chicago Union and coax a sample copy.

In common with other Artists Unions, it is actively fighting curtailment and seeking means of expanding the Art Project to meet actual needs. Because of its progressive policy the past year has seen a steady increase in its membership.

A series of lectures for membership and public is planned; arrangements are being made for a Spring Union No-Jury No Prize Show.

## CLEVELAND

The Cleveland Artists Union and the Supervisors Association together defeated a move to cut supervisors' wages from \$150 per month to \$116 and extend the hours from 74 to 169. Broemmell, Art Project Supervisor, has resigned. We hear that Mr. Broemmell strongly intimated in his resignation that the Union got in his hair. Reducing pay and increasing hours is one of the best ways we know of for creating trouble.

The Union is cooperating with the administration in an effort to establish a print lending division in the public library.

## MINNESOTA

The Minnesota Union's report of layoffs and transfers to other projects is similar to

reports from other sections of the country. Action is being taken to forestall any decimation of the numbers on the Art Project.

The present cultural activities include an exhibition at the Unitarian Center in conjunction with the educational groups from others centers in Minnesota and a Union show. A successful Surrealist Ball helped clean up bills owed by the Union.

## NEW YORK

The New York Union and the American Artists' Congress are arranging a series of broadcasts over WHN. A fifteen minute Union-sponsored program over WABC is being planned with Theodore Dreiser speaking.

La Guardia, New York's peppy little Mayor, issued a blast at Hitler's fanatical regime. He stated that no artist could adequately portray the horrors in Nazi Germany. The New York Union was not caught napping. In a statement appearing in the press, it offered to start work immediately on such a project, to be exhibited at the World's Fair. An offer was made to the Union to create a Chamber of Horrors under Hitler to be placed on exhibition in New York. The Union accepted. If this exhibition is successful, it could be sent on the road throughout the country and would pay for itself by a small admission fee.

Due to an increase in its activities, the Artists Union has raised its monthly dues to \$1. Social and cultural activities will help to defray the increased expenditures.

## ST. LOUIS

The recently formed St. Louis Union is making excellent progress. During the past month the membership has been more than doubled.

To stimulate interest for the establishment of a real W.P.A. Art Project, suitable for the needs of St. Louis, the Union called a mass meeting on February 11. The excellent cooperation of the Newspaper Guild and especially Mr. Julius Klyman, International Vice President of the Newspaper Guild, contributed greatly to the success of this meeting. Civic leaders and the St. Louis press are pushing a campaign for the establishment of an art project.

Joe Jones, St. Louis painter, who went as a delegate to the L.E.A.R. Congress in Mexico, returned and made a report to the Union.

## BALTIMORE

On March 1 the Union opened its local exhibition of prints at Goucher College, continuing there for two weeks. The exhibition then traveled to Park School and from there will go to as many local trade unions as have facilities permitting the hanging of the show. Speakers from the Union will be provided to the trade unions if desired. The Baltimore Union will campaign in these trade unions for support of the Federal Art Bill. Two Artists Union delegates attended the Citizens Alliance conference to gain support for a larger Federal Art Project and for endorsement of the Federal Art Bill. The Baltimore Union has taken a stand similar to that of the Chicago Artists Union in regard to rental policy.

## WASHINGTON, D. C.

Add one more to the constantly growing number of Artists Unions throughout the country. The artists in Washington announce the formation of a Union. They have applied for a charter and will be known as "The District of Columbia Artists Union." They have already organized 50 per cent of the project artists. With the help of the Workers' Alliance they are going to bat on the following grievances: 1. Arbitrary demotion of Project Supervisor who has become active in Union matters, 1. The Regional pay scale now in effect. It is the Union's contention that Region II pay scale should obtain in Washington as statistics show the cost of living there to be as high as that of New York. 3. Refusal on the part of the District of Columbia Public Assistance Division to grant relief certification to certain non-relief artists who either have been dismissed or are about to be dismissed due to reduction and proposed reduction of non-relief quota. 4. Lack of cooperation on the part of Regional Director in matters of relief certification and the furthering of creative talent on the project.

## NEW JERSEY

The Artists Union of New Jersey has been confining most of its activities to a fight to halt a serious lay-off situation. Working closely with the Workers' Alliance, they have participated in picket lines, demonstrations and a sit-in. The sit-in was called off when the administration promised to reinstate needy workers and to halt further lay-offs.





Detail from Mural for Overseers of the Public Welfare Building, Boston: G. LLOYD.

## MASSACHUSETTS

The Artists Union of Boston is waging a vigorous campaign to prevent the destruction of George Lloyd's partially completed mural. Realistic treatment of the subject-matter, "The Procedure of Obtaining Relief," has incurred the wrath of two or

three of Boston's leading politicians, including the Mayor. The mural is an excellent job and was readily passed by the Art Commission, the Welfare Board and the other usual agencies of red tape. The issue is clearly one of freedom of expression and on that basis the Union has lined up wide support from other organizations.

## ARCHITECTS, PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS COLLABORATIVE

Several months ago the National Society of Mural Painters decided to hold an exhibition, using the World's Fair as its theme. It was suggested that each mural painter of the Society invite an architect, a sculptor and landscape architect to design and decorate a typical World's Fair building. Fifteen members of the Society decided to work together on one idea, instead of fifteen individual projects. An architect and six sculptors were invited; a workshop set up, the group calling itself "The Architects, Painters and Sculptors Collaborative." This is the first time muralists worked together with an architect and sculptors deciding on the character of the project, from the designing of floor plans and elevations through the completion of the model of the buildings, grounds, mural and sculptural decorations for it.

The project decided on was a "Community Center" for an average American community. It includes an auditorium, library and art galleries, as well as equipment for all-year-round athletic activities. One of the attractive features is an outdoor swimming pool with sculptures used

as diving and landing islands. Murals are placed in a colonnade circle which accommodates the three prime activities of recreational and cultural life of the community.

The mural art and sculpture is planned to integrate the arts with the popular activities of the people. Community centers of this type throughout the country would be a very important contribution to the cultural life of America.

This whole group was invited to participate in the Architectural League exhibition current to May 15, at 215 West 57th Street.

The painters include: Monty Lewis, Leo Katz, Louis Ferstadt, Anatole Shulkin, Harold Lehman, Clara Thomas, Marion Greenwood, Stuyvesant Van Veen, Grace Greenwood, Hugo Gellert, Maxwell B. Starr, Jacob Burck, Howard Lee Irwin, Ryah Ludins, Michael Lenson.

The sculptors: William Zorach, Jose Ruiz de Rivera, Aaron Goodelman, Concetta Scaravaglione, Minna Harkavy, Isamu Noguchi. The architect, Oscar Stonorov; model by Joseph Mueller; screens by William Freed.

## A LETTER FROM SPAIN

*An A. U. Member Writes from Albacete*

Salud!

Have received the bad news that \*\*\* has been sent back due to serious illness. \*\*\* arranged his departure. I was shocked when I heard it. I suppose when you get this letter he'll be back in the states. Please tell him that I feel very bad about it since I hoped to meet him here.

We are receiving all the training necessary (within the limitations of circumstance).

Personally am very impatient and looking forward to going to the front. Have adopted myself thoroughly to the mode of life. At the beginning I felt a little uncomfortable, however, consider myself quite adjustable.

I have been doing numerous sketches which I shall send to the *New Masses* and *ART FRONT* as soon as I have sufficient numbers. The locale and costumes of the people are like the Mexican in a certain sense, however, much darker and sombrero in values.

We expect to move up any day now. Received news of losses of Americans here on the front. We are taking it for granted now. I personally have reconciled myself to the cost. However, will be very careful and will make them pay. As yet we are most all in the infantry. Would like to specialize in machine gunning or hand grenade throwing. Find it much more damaging.

Something very unusual happened. I met two men from my old town in the Polish brigade. One of them used to be a school chum of mine in gymnasium and we used to fight fiercely; the other is in the campaign since the beginning. A powerful bricklayer. Was declared dead three times. Obituaries have been written about him citing his heroism and each time he turned up. He is a machine gunner—he calls it a typewriter—a grenade thrower and trench mortar specialist. Our reunion was quite unusual.

The people here are unreserved behind the Popular Front. Everybody is confident. You people must strain every bit of energy to send various supplies—though food is plentiful.

How is the old A. U.? I shall do everything here so that lengthy meetings shall become unnecessary. I hate them.

## NOTE TO SUBSCRIBERS

Due to technical difficulties we were unable to print the April issue of *ART FRONT*.

This double number covers the April-May period and will be so recorded in our files.



# Form and Content in Art<sup>\*</sup>

BY F. D. KLINGENDER

ENGLISH art has reached one of its most critical turning points. At a time, when the profound crisis of our economic and political environment renders the esthetic isolation of the artist an intolerable anachronism, the old "art for art's sake" revolt against "literary" content finds its consistent culmination in the abstract artist's claim that the discovery of pure, "significant" form is the supreme and only legitimate object of art. In this paradoxical situation, it is imperative to examine what is the true significance of content and form in art, what is the relationship between the two, whether in fact art without content is not as much an impossibility as content without form, and finally what are the ties by which the content-form unity that we call art is linked to the wider reality of social existence.

It is impossible to answer these questions in any conclusive manner in terms of "esthetics." Any attempt to do so would immediately be faced with the rival claims of innumerable theories offering solutions radically at variance from one another. The mutually opposed claims of the numerous abstract schools would as a group be disputed by the surrealists, the futurists, the neo-realists, the expressionists, not to mention the various brands of impressionists or the old academicians. Moreover, the adoption of any one of these theories would automatically lead to a drastic limitation of the field of enquiry, for vast complexes of what at one time or another in the history of man was undoubtedly regarded as art would of necessity be incompatible with the basic principles of the esthetic standard selected (the academicians, e.g., would regard the work both of the primitives and the moderns as unworthy of the name of art, while the moderns would shrug their shoulders in disdain at the

"literary" aberrations of the classicists and academicians). Unless we are to be satisfied with ephemeral and at best only partial results, we must seek a basis of analysis that will enable us to include all manifestations ever regarded as art.

We must replace the abstract question of the meaning of "art" for "man" by a *historical* analysis seeking to interpret each of the innumerable manifestations and theories of art in terms of the specific social group whose art and esthetic conception they were. Art is a form of social consciousness. One of the forms of consciousness, that is to say, expressing the feeling and aspirations, the outlook on life and reality as a whole, of some specific group of individuals. Any history of art that attempts to provide more than a mere catalogue of the historical *forms* of art, more than a mere list of iconographic changes, any history attempting to interpret the *significance* of art, must therefore descend from the Olympic heights of "art for art's sake" and penetrate to the roots of artistic experience by relating its historical manifestations to the basic processes of social development.

"Ethics, religion, metaphysics, and the other ideological spheres and the forms of consciousness that correspond to them thus no longer maintain their apparent independence. They have no history, they have no development; but as men develop their material production, their material exchange relationships, they change, together with this basic reality of their existence, also their methods of thinking and the results of their thought. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. The first (idealist) method starts from consciousness as the living entity, the second, corresponding to the realities of life, starts from the real living individuals and regards consciousness merely as *their* consciousness." (Marx-Engels: *Deutsche Ideologie*, Section I, 1845-6.)

Like all other forms of social consciousness art is an expression of social existence, an ideological reflection of the everchanging forms which the struggle between social man and nature assumes in the process of human development. If we are to analyze art, we must thus commence by analyzing the social group whose art it is. The character of any given phase of social reality is objectively determined first by its technical equipment for the struggle with nature, by its productive resources, and secondly by the specific manner in which its individual members cooperate with one another in applying their technique to the tasks of production. In all phases of social development intermediary between the classless communities of the early hunting tribes and the classless society of Communism the latter criterion is expressed in the class structure of the given social unit.

Art, however, is more than a mere reflection of social reality. It is at the same time, and even primarily, a revolutionary agent for the transformation of that reality. Untrammelled by the rigid fetters of transcendental dogma, without, on the other hand, having to resort to the lengthy processes of logical deduction and experimental verification, art is the most spontaneous form of social consciousness. As such it immediately reacts to any change in the basic factors of existence, it immediately senses the resulting discrepancy between the new conditions of life and the old forms of consciousness, which it at once sets about to transform. In continually changing the consciousness of man, art is one of the most powerful and indispensable allies of all forces of advance.

Viewed in this light, the problem of content assumes an entirely new significance. Content is not, what it necessarily appears to be, if art is approached as an independent entity, if the study of art is divorced from the study of social reality, the mere "literary" subject-matter of art, its history is not mere iconography. The con-

<sup>\*</sup>Introductory Notes for a series of twelve discussion-lectures on French and English XIX and XX century art conducted for members of the Artists' International in 1934/5.



tent of art is an expression of the peculiar emotional and intellectual response of a given social group to the material conditions of its existence, a response that is given an immediately convincing, because emotionally heightened, *form* in art. Form without content, form torn from its vital source of social existence must necessarily be sterile. The negation of content leaves art a lifeless abstraction doomed to decay. Form is the language by which content is communicated, to remain convincing it must change with every change of the content it is destined to express. Content and form are thus the inseparable poles of a greater unity, the unity of style that has its roots in the mother soil of social reality.

But just as in a society rent by the conflict of antagonistic classes there are as many different social realities, as many attitudes to reality, as many ideologies, as there are classes, so there must necessarily be and always have been many different simultaneously existing styles expressing the conflicting ideologies of these different classes. And in the same way the esthetic standards of the various groups in any given class society must necessarily differ from one another. Each class will judge the *content* of art according to the profundity with which its own outlook is embodied in it, and its *form* according to the intelligibility, the force of conviction, the propaganda appeal, with which that outlook is advocated. As long as there are social classes, there can be no single scale of esthetic values accepted at any one time as binding by all. In the same way, as long as the basic conditions of social existence change with the development of man, the character of art expressing the response of man to these conditions will change and with it the esthetic standards of the given society. Nevertheless, for the progressive class of today, for the working class, there *is* an objective standard for the evaluation of art. That standard is the standard of history. At any given period—today no less than in the past—it will judge *that* style to be the most vital that is allied to the forces of advance, that in expressing the outlook of the most progressive class shatters the resistance of petrified conventions and in transforming the outlook of man clears the path for the victory of the new.

## II

All these general considerations will not, however, take us very far, will not help us to obtain clarity on our present position, unless we apply them to a study of the concrete processes by which that situation arose. We must, in other words, study the development of modern art as an integral feature of the development of modern industrial capitalism with its contending

classes. This is the task that we have set ourselves in the following discussions. Once we have obtained a clear conception of the social content of the various styles and movements of art that have come into existence since the emergence of industrial capitalism, we shall be able to assess the significance of the movements which are today claiming to be the most advanced, and to obtain a clear understanding of the problems facing the artist who in the present situation desires to offer his services to the working class.

In no country of modern Europe did the economic and political development of capitalist society since the late 18th century proceed in such clearly demarcated stages and with as little admixture of complicating factors derived from pre-capitalist forms of existence as in France, while at the same time no other national art development as transparently reflects the basic changes in the material and social conditions of life. French 19th century history provides the standard scale, the "blue print," for the economic, political and ideological development of modern capitalism. That is why we shall be well advised to commence our enquiry with an examination of that scale. The results thus obtained will greatly assist us in our second task of unravelling the infinitely more complex problems presented by the recent history of English art, the ultimate social roots of which must be traced back to the great revolutions of the 17th century.

Let me present to you a brief synopsis, a mere list of chapter headings of the field we are about to survey in the first series of our discussions. Even this sketchy outline of the most advanced movements—the important problem of the simultaneously existing more backward styles must necessarily be left for our detailed discussion of each successive phase—will enable us to advance a more concrete hypothesis concerning the relative significance of content and form in modern art.

### 1. Revolution, Empire, Restoration — approximately 1780-1830.

The heroic birth of modern bourgeois society. The creation, that is to say, of the peculiar legal and political forms within which modern capitalism could develop without any feudal restrictions—and, once the tremendous struggle for the establishment of these forms had been fought to its victorious conclusion, the revelation of the true, unheroic and shabby character of this new society, "whose real captains sat in the counting houses."

"But however unheroic the reality of bourgeois existence is, it required heroism, self-sacrifice, terror, civil war and murderous battles to bring it into being. And

its gladiators found in the *stern, classical traditions of the Roman Republic the ideals, the forms of art, the illusions* they required in order to conceal the restricted bourgeois content of their struggles from themselves and to sustain their passion on the level of the great historical tragedy of which they were the actors." (Marx: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852.)

The development of David's classicism in the successive phases of this struggle\*:

(a) The content of David's three great pre-revolutionary programme paintings, not just the "literary" anecdotes of the three Horatii, Socrates and Brutus, but the flaming slogans of Patriotism, Reason and Justice; their classicist form: the programmatic crystallization of these slogans in terms of a symbolism that alone could raise the enthusiasm of the "gladiators" of the revolution to fever pitch.

(b) From symbol to reality in the white heat of the revolution: the deeds (Oath in the Tennis House, 1791) and martyrs (Marat, 1793) of the revolution; formal advance through classicism to realism (history painting without classical stage properties, the murdered revolutionary as left by the assassin): the climax in the political and artistic development of David.

(c) Divorce between political action and art and consequent divergence between a more and more academic classicism ("history" painting) and realism (the bourgeois portrait) in the succeeding phases of Directoire reaction, Empire and exile during the Restoration.

To the uninspiring reality of Restoration society, "absorbed in money making and the peaceful warfare of competition," with its noisy superstructure of retired emigré land owners and financiers, the advanced artists of the younger generation reacted in a threefold manner: on the extreme right wing the total escape from social reality into the "pure" form of a romanticized classicism (Ingres—classicism, no longer the fighting symbol of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, is deprived of its vital content of realism and raised to the arid pinnacle of an academic cannon); in the center a negation of existing reality by means of a romantic glorification of the past (Delacroix, up to 1830 still more or less con-

\* For an account of the art of David and his contemporaries see: F. Antal, *Reflections on Classicism and Romanticism* (Burlington Magazine, April, 1935, et seq.), and also W. Friedländer, *Hauptströmungen der Französischen Malerei von David bis Cézanne*, I. Von David bis Delacroix, 1930. The most authoritative account of XIX and XX century art as a whole is: Hans Hildebrandt, *Kunst des 19 und 20 Jahrhunderts. Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft, 1924-1931*. The reader will there find the majority of the illustrations used for the purpose of these discussions.



sciously opposed to the reactionary régime—"Liberty leading the People on the Barricade," 1831—immediately afterwards journey to Morocco: to the escape in time is added the escape in space to the glamorous East); on the left wing, however, the progressive conquest of nature through the rapidly expanding new industry found its embodiment in Gericault's consistent development of the realist tendencies inherent in David's classicism; Gericault's opposition—the opposition of the progressive industrial bourgeois—to the Restoration régime is dramatically expressed in his "Raft of the Medusa" of 1819.

## 2. The Revolutions of 1830, 1848, 1870-71.

Replacement of the restoration régime of financiers and landlords by the July monarchy with its commercial and industrial ruling clique. The rapid emergence of modern factory production. The industrial proletariat for the first time appears on the forum of history with its own independent demands in the revolution of 1848: all other classes combine to smash this new menace. "Reversal of the sequence of the revolution:" "the working class not yet able to rule, the bourgeoisie no longer able to do so." The second republic succumbs to blatant demagoguery of the property-saving gangster chief, Bonaparte. Full development of industrial capitalism with its attendant orgies of speculation and crises. The Commune: the first practical demonstration of the proletarian state rallying all the forces of advance to its support.

Against the background of the now canonized Ingres academism and Delacroix romanticism and of the official "juste milieu" militarism, historicism (Meissonier), and orientalism, all the forces of progress now concentrated (a) on the progressive achievement of objective (though still mechanical) realism: the Barbizon landscape painters, Courbet, the early Manet; (b) on the advanced (though still petty bourgeois-anarchic) political cartoon: Daumier and his fellow caricaturists. Discovery of the peasant and worker still to some extent romanticized (Millet), objectively reporting (Courbet: Funeral of Ornan, 1850, Roadmenders, 1851). Climax of objective bourgeois realism, political identification of the most advanced bourgeois artists with the Commune.

## 3. The Third Republic up to 1900.

The emergence of imperialism. Colonization and capital export. The rentiers now replaced the active industrialists as the ideologically decisive section of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie as a class ceased to be progressive. It was no longer interested—after the Commune—in discovering ob-

jective, and especially social reality. Instead it turned to the cultivation of its subjective response to sense impressions.

(a) First response: subjective naturalism replaced the former quest for objective reality. Refined receptivity for light, color, movement. Impressionism, Pointillism, etc. (the later Manet, Pissarro, Monet, Renier, Degas, etc.) Social reality admitted only in the shape of bohemianism and fin de siècle decadence (Degas, Toulouse Lautrec).

(b) The three leaders of post-impressionism: Cézanne, the lonely recluse, friend of Zola, socially disinterested, but decisive in his further advance (corresponding to the still rapidly progressing scientific conquest of nature) in the discovery of objective reality: display of the formal structure of matter.—Van Gogh, impassioned champion of the poor and suppressed, but unable from the standpoint of his Christian mysticism to take up the political cause of the working class. Formal successor of Millet, he attained the height of pre-revolutionary social realism in his drawings of miners and peasants made during his stay in a Belgian mining village. Explosive discharge of his tragic fervor in an impassioned attempt to conquer reality as an artist: barely two years of unparalleled artistic achievement ending in mental derangement and suicide.—Gauguin: in an age of rapid communication Tahiti replaced Morocco, primitive society the Orient, as the peaceful refuge for those who desired an escape in space from the terrifying strife of capitalist existence.

## 4. Pre-war Imperialism.

We must now leave the restricted sphere of France and examine the advanced art of capitalist Europe as a whole. The conquest of the pre-capitalist world by the great capitalist nations was by now complete, capital exports simultaneously reached their greatest expansion, imperialist rivalry threatened to explode at any moment, while after the relative lull of the later decades of the 19th century internal class conflict again flared up in an acute form. Climax of external and internal anarchy.

The unity of the world was shattered, there could no longer be any uniform conception of the world, any unity of style: the claims to pre-eminence of the academic naturalists, of the impressionists, neo-impressionists, pointillists, plein-air painters were challenged by the proto-expressionist mysticists (Munch, Ensor), the expressionists, Delauney, Matisse, etc., in France; Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluff, the "Brücke" and "Blaue Reiter" groups, etc., in Germany), the primitivists (Rousseau, Paula Modersohn, etc.), the cubists (Picasso, Braque,

etc.), the proto-fascist futurists (Marinetti, Carra, Boccini, Severini, etc., who with their violently militarist activism embodied the expansionist cravings of Italian Imperialism that had come too late to share in the capitalist division of the world).

In the movements emerging during this phase and reaching their consistent culmination in the following war and post-war crisis era the escape from objective reality was taken to extreme lengths. The subjective naturalism of the impressionists was now discarded in favor of an absolute subjectivism that was no longer concerned with "external" reality in any shape or form, but either claimed to interpret the "inner meaning" of reality as it appeared to the sovereign ego of the artists (the bourgeois intellectual crushed between the forces of collective classes, strove desperately to find a compensation in art for his own impotence), or else delved into the primitive impulse world of the mysterious realm of the subconscious.

It is characteristic for this situation that almost every one of these movements could only hope to establish at least some kind of contact with a wider public if it issued a constant flow of manifestoes. These innumerable and mutually conflicting theories—conflicting in most instances even with the artistic practice they professed to explain (the surrealists are the most flagrant case in point!)—only served to increase the chaos.

*(We regret that lack of space forces us to continue Mr. Klingender's article in the next issue of ART FRONT—Editors)*

## PROF. EDWARD ROTHSCHILD

Progressive artists and students of art everywhere have lost a sympathetic friend and teacher through the sudden death of Professor Edward Rothchild, of the Department of Art of the University of Chicago.

Professor Rothchild expressed his sympathy with the Artists Union of Chicago in word and in deed. His sponsorship of the various union activities and his participation as a speaker in the symposia of the union, demonstrated clearly his deep interest in the economic and cultural problems of the contemporary artist.

The Artists Union of Chicago at its general membership meeting on March 2, passed a resolution expressing its deepfelt sympathy to Mrs. Rothchild and others of Professor Rothchild's family, in their great loss and bereavement.

*Artists Union of Chicago  
per S. Loeb*



# THE HARLEM ARTISTS GUILD

By Gwendolyn Bennett

WITH the assumption of its duties as part of the national steering committee of the Federation of Artists' Unions, the Harlem Artists' Guild definitely comes of age. Organized originally with the intent of guarding the cultural, social and economic integrity of the Negro artist, the Guild within two years has arrived at the point in its development where it sees itself in relation to all artists, black and white. From such a point in its organizational development the Guild does well to pause in retrospective evaluation of its accomplishments up to the present time.

Following an exhibition of work by Negro artists, sponsored by the College Art Association and the W.P.A., in March, 1935, the Harlem Artists' Guild was organized with less than a dozen members who saw the need for an organization that would have as its aim the welfare of Negro artists. Its present membership of approximately ninety artists has the same aims augmented by the growing understanding that the fate of Negro artists is identified with that of all other artists. The Guild plans to become more active in the organizational work of the New York Artists'

Union, the Coordination Committee and the American Artists' Congress. While concerned primarily with problems peculiar to Negro artists by virtue of their bond of color and persecution, the Guild membership has been invigorated and heartened by the support its small number receives from the thousands of artists, banded together for their mutual welfare.

Part of the original program of the Guild was a plan for a Harlem community art center. The Federal Art program in Harlem is now housed in the West 123rd Street Music-Art Center preparatory to moving into a large place devoted solely to art. The opening of the Mayor's proposed art center will go far toward materializing the program put forward by the Harlem Artists' Guild. While supporting the need for an art center and critical of faulty attempts in this direction, the Guild is ready to lend its assistance to both ventures. The opening exhibition of the present Music-Art Center combined work done by the artists and children working under the guidance of the W.P.A., and paintings and sculpture by members of the Harlem Artists' Guild. Attendance in the life-class

at the W.P.A. center is part of the indoor program of the Guild. Through conference with the Committee of One Hundred, a municipal body headed by Mrs. Breckinridge, and consultation with members of the Board of Education under whose aegis the proposed art center is to be set up, the Guild is keeping a watchful eye on the direction its organization is taking.

Employment of Negro artists has always been one of the Guild's major problems. When the Guild was organized, there were only a half dozen Negro artists employed on the W.P.A. project. This number has been materially increased. Through the efforts of the Guild, Negro artists are now employed in the teaching, mural, easel and index of design departments of the Federal Art Project. Before the formation of the Guild there was no Negro supervisor on the W.P.A. Projects; now in the Federal Art Project there are three Negro supervisors. Delegations from the Guild meet with the Administration of the Project and with organizations dealing with the problems of employment and quality of work among artists. In this connection the Guild hopes eventually to compile a roster of Negro artists from all over the country, their status—whether employed or unemployed—and their qualifications.

The cultural program of the Guild is steadily expanding. Lectures, symposia, and debates on technical subjects of interest to artists are arranged monthly for Guild members and associates. Sessions devoted to music, literature and other cultural subjects are offered to the general public once a month. Exhibitions of painting and sculpture have been shown in Harlem community centers and schools. An exhibition of work by the Harlem Artists' Guild is being prepared for the American Artists' School. Through sketch classes, museum tours and lectures for the benefit of its membership and the community the Harlem Artists Guild seeks to create a cultural program that will ultimately place the Negro artist in a position of importance in the society of which he is a part.

The Guild sets out to combat those forces that keep the Negro artist from his place in the sun, to strengthen and aid those forces that militate for his good. The Guild stands shoulder to shoulder with artists and organizations fighting on a united front for the freedom and integrity of all artists regardless of race or color. It has given no quarter to ignorance and prejudice; no ground to malice and ill-intent. What will the Guild do? It will continue its fight for the Negro artist's legitimate place as a worthwhile force in the society of which he is a part.



*Three Way Traffic: HARRY GOTTLIEB  
Courtesy Federal Art Project*



# BUILDING A NEW ART SCHOOL

By Philip Evergood

THE American Artists School is attempting to provide a contemporary approach to art. We believe that present day art training necessitates more than is being given to students today. We make a fundamentally different appraisal of art than most, and perhaps all schools or groups interested in art training. Art has many disciples and as many differing concepts, ranging all the way from that which is purely decorative and subordinated to the home, to that art which stands aggressively by itself in making assertions about life and society.

But there is considerable controversy over the need for an art that looks at society realistically. Such an art, since it has a point of view, will unquestionably make statements that violate the views of some people.

It is my mission to make a plea for such an art because of the following reasons. The chief objections to painting that deals with our lives is that it transcends art and becomes propaganda. This is a convenient and somewhat devastating argument, but not an insurmountable one. First of all, art has definite limitations in order for it to be art and these are that it must be true esthetically and factually. It cannot go beyond these boundaries and remain art, and painting that doesn't confine itself within these limitations will find no more encouragement from us than it will from others.

Art can and should deal with our lives in a way that adds to them and still not be propaganda in the derogatory sense of the word as attacked by those who advocate an art devoid of thought and content. Present day painting has such a task before it and too few of the artists realize this need. I think that people as a whole are crying for the answers to many of their questions and there are numerous questions because we live in a turbulent world filled with contradictions. People as a whole are eagerly and semi-consciously searching for a stabilizing philosophy, an understanding of their relation to society and the universe, to their neighbors and their children. To many the world is becoming ununderstandable in spite of the growth of science and industry and commerce. When human re-

lationships should be idealistic we find race antagonisms growing; when man should be filled with spiritual fullness we find growing sadism on a mass scale; everywhere we witness these amazing contradictions between a growing barbarism in a period of history when Man has conquered nature and developed science and industry to the highest levels ever known. What is the result? People no longer have a sense of values, of ideals or futures. That is one of the many reasons why an art devoted to understanding America is so necessary.

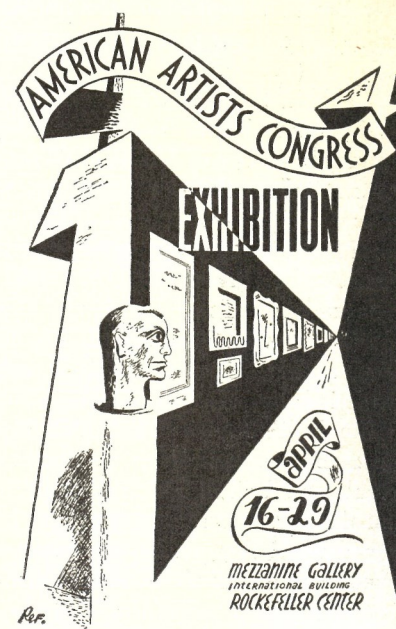
There is no rule for creating an American art. We of the American Artists School don't presume to have the secret. But we are doing this;—We believe that artists who can clearly see the complicated structure of America and pick out its basic social pattern, who are sympathetic to its people and its culture and traditions, who are interested in the psychology of its classes and groups have the basis for saying something about America.

It is out of such material and similar approaches to art that we think something vital for all of us in art can be obtained. Isn't the cry about "propaganda" rather silly in the face of such evidence? The very motivation of the artists makes the cry, propaganda, ludicrous.

A section of the American Artists School is devoted to a study of art from this point of view. And, although it is all too inadequate, we believe, however, that we are introducing methods of instruction that, if enlarged upon, would ultimately be of real value to American painting. One of our fundamental beliefs is that the student should not be confined to technical training to the exclusion of real life. If a study of real life is coordinated with his technical art training he naturally will incorporate this into his work. Thus his form is determined by his content, not by his instructor. He doesn't become an imitator, he really becomes a creator. Our modest efforts at our school more than justify this belief.

But . . . our efforts are much too small in proportion to the real demand for progressive art training in America. Our largest and best known schools are per-

petuating old and untimely methods. We, as a young school, are on the other hand too weak materially so far to make a definite and lasting impression. Nor have we the *active* support of some of the best minds in the art and pedagogical fields. We have their interest and their moral support. But we say that this is insufficient. Furthermore, we say that this is not our exclusive problem but is the problem of every person interested not only in art but in progress. To put it bluntly, we say that this problem is the problem of all people active in progressive art and art educational work in this country. Furthermore, we are no longer going to assume sole responsibility. We raise the question of progressive art education and training for all those interested in art to solve. And we raise specifically to people like Lewis Mumford, Max Weber, John Dewey, Alfred Stieglitz, Walter Pach, J. B. Neumann, Charles Beard, Julien Levy, the question of building an art school that will give a student a chance to study the best of every form of art from the abstract to expressionism, to surrealism, to American genre, to experiments in painting revolving around American thought and content.



Poster: ANTON REFREGIER



# RENTALS:

## A Letter from the American Society

### A Resolution of the Artists Coordination Committee

*Artists Union of Baltimore*

402 St. Paul Street,  
Baltimore, Maryland.

Sirs:

In answering the accusations contained in your open letter to the Society of Painters, Sculptors & Gravers, we should like to point out certain basic known facts that you choose to completely ignore. Your condemnation and highly self righteous stand is based on a premise that has no realistic justification.

At the time of the Artists Congress last year and also by interview and letter the position of the Society was made clear. That is, that it did not, and could not by its constitution assume the role of National Organizer for the rental idea.

That we asked support for our stand at that time, and endeavored to propagandize the principle of rentals is not a contradiction of this. By the nature of our organization we could only act for ourselves, however we might have wished otherwise.

The great variety of special problems confronting artists organizations, in their communities throughout the country—made it self-evident that, at this time, the boycott as a tactical weapon could only be a matter for local decision in relation to local conditions.

We felt that in conducting our boycott we were not assuming that it was the only way to work for the rental principle.

This attitude was further justified by the fact that many organizations including the Artists Congress and the Artists Union of New York fully endorsed the Rental Resolution but did not make the Boycott a condition of membership.

It should be apparent that if the Painters, Sculptors & Gravers at no time assumed the responsibility of National Organizer, it was not sabotaging the rental idea when it suspended its boycott.

With the widest variety of esthetic and political opinion represented within its membership and faced with organizational difficulties, the Society did the realistic thing and put the boycott to a vote. The result is known.

The Baltimore Artists Union says that the Society should have conducted a National Poll before deciding its policy and that the minority members should have resigned when that policy was changed. Our position as stated above should answer the first. This latter suggestion that the course of the minority was clearly indicated shows a rather immature conception of organiza-

tion. The minority in this case felt that the unity of the society was preferable to a split on this tactical point. To date only two have resigned because of the boycott decision.

In the March issue of *Art Front* the proposals of the Artists Union's Steering Committee should, apart from the excellence of the suggestions themselves, give to any informed and fair-minded person some idea that the problem is not a simple one.

We sincerely regret that our publicising of the rental idea, and our fight for it, caused this misconception of the society's purpose. We are sorry that the Baltimore Artists Union because of this misconception, allowed its disappointment to, in our opinion, misconstrue the facts of the case. (The points involving the Baltimore Exhibition of last Spring, we feel, were fully explained by our correspondence at that time.)

However, as a group we do not feel that we deserve the condemnation contained in your letter.

We are confronted with an organizational problem—to bring the Society to the point of functioning more practically and intelligently as an organization for the establishment of the rental idea as an accepted economic principle in this country.

The Baltimore Artists Union may think us wrong in our method and suggest we "Rest in Peace"; under the circumstances that can't be done. We shall proceed according to our lights.

And with all good will, suggest that the Baltimore Artists Union save its ammunition for the real enemy.

Sincerely yours,

*George Picken,*  
Secretary

March 23, 1937.

### RESOLUTION PRESENTED BY THE ARTISTS COORDINATION COMMITTEE TO ITS MEMBER SOCIETIES

In its efforts to find a formula acceptable to all organizations, the Artists Coordination Committee has passed the following resolution to be submitted to its various memberships:

*Whereas*, THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PAINTERS, SCULPTORS and GRAVERS has repeatedly asserted that the temporary suspension of the boycott is in no sense an abandonment of the Rental Policy, but is an expediency to allow for preparation of a wider and more systematic

appeal for support among artists and the public; and

*Whereas*, The Artists Coordination Committee has after proper investigation found that the Rental Policy has already achieved considerable success, and,

*Whereas*, The Artists Coordination Committee has come to the conclusion that the Rental Policy can be enforced if the energies and efforts of the artists are unified on the basis of a common understanding, therefore be it

**RESOLVED**, That this society authorizes the Artists Coordination Committee to formulate a program and proceed to organize all artists for the purpose of making effective a policy of artists collecting a rental fee for exhibiting and requests its delegates to keep this society informed and submit for its approval all initiative steps taken in the execution of this plan and be it further

**RESOLVED**, That this society believes in the principle of artists collecting a rental fee for exhibiting works of art and pledges itself to work for the adoption of a program that will make this principle effective.

## CORRESPONDENCE

We have received a letter from Rufino Tamayo, in which he vigorously protests the attitude of Correspondent A. J. Schneider, as expressed in his letter criticizing our critic's review of Tamayo's one man show at the Julien Levy Gallery.

Mr. Tamayo's letter is too long to reprint in this issue but he wishes to state that the unfortunate impression given by Mr. Schneider's letter, that some amicable collusion existed between him and the ART FRONT critic, is incorrect. He had never met our critic, who praised him as one of Mexico's foremost painters. He feels that he should not be held responsible because that critic admired his work. He adds that he is in full accord with the work and organizational activity of the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists

Mr. Schneider's contention was that too much space was given to Tamayo and no recognition to the work of the L.E.A.R. At that time, one of our editors was in Mexico attending the congress and our report printed in this issue comes late merely because we skipped the April issue. In the near future, conditions permitting, we hope to devote a good part of an issue to the Mexican movement in art, and, in particular, the work of the L.E.A.R. artists, who are doing the most distinguished work in Mexico today, and who are actively in the forefront of organizing the Popular Front in the cultural field in Mexico.





Refugee: JOE LEOIT  
Federal Art Project Exhibition

## ART and SOCIETY

A Review by William Phillips

*ART AND SOCIETY*, by George Plekhanov  
—Critics Group. 35c.

IN the absence of a critical tradition and with few Mexican classics on art and literature available in translation, it is not surprising that so little progress toward a Marxian esthetic has been made in this country. Just a few years ago, for example, Marxian art critics tried to compress modern painting into the genre of didacticism—a practice that had more in common with the tendency of native criticism to convert ideas into commodities, than with the spirit, if not the letter of Marxism. To what extent such distortions were unavoidable is hard to say, for theories of art are not guided by the laws of reason alone, but one thing is certain: a bohemian eclecticism will *guarantee* the failure of Marxist criticism, to say nothing of art itself. In this respect these two essays by Plekhanov on the relation of art to society are especially valuable; not that we can parrot either the method or the conclusions, but because they raise so many problems of method and approach.

From these essays and other translated fragments, it appears that Plekhanov's contribution to the study of art is his concrete demonstration that literature and painting are the aesthetic summary of the

economic and political history of man. Not that other critics were blind to this relation—Plekhanov himself quotes many such observations to support his position—but they usually stated it as a cultural metaphor: aristocratic drama paralleled the ascendancy of the court; the rise of the bourgeoisie brought a moral bourgeois literature. Plekhanov went further; with the method of historical materialism, which exposes the needs of classes and the way cultural forms supply or conflict with those needs, he was able to explain the coexistence of different forms in a given social period, the contradictions in the work of an artist, and, above all, the causes for the death of one tendency and the rise of another. In the first essay, *French Drama and Painting of the Eighteenth Century*, he traces this drama from the pomp and bombast of aristocratic tragedy, through the idealization of the middle class and its morality in sentimental comedy, and finally to the restoration of classical tragedy—the ideals of which were really bourgeois—when the middle class tired of seeing its nondescript face in its dramatic mirror. Similarly in painting, Boucher was followed by Greuze, who gave way to David; and throughout Plekhanov shows the penetration of a bourgeois content into classical forms.

The second essay, *Art and Society*, is by far the more important; here Plekhanov

submits the romantic literature of the nineteenth century and the abstract painting of the twentieth to the same kind of analysis, and he extracts some basic "laws" of art, of which the most famous is: "The tendency of artists and those concerned with art to adopt an attitude of art for art's sake arises when a hopeless contradiction exists between them and the social environment," and when, he later adds, these artists are opposed to social revolution. In his application of this law to the French novel Plekhanov reaches one of his few creative observations: that while the anti-social attitude of the French romantics and the Parnassians restricted their vision, it nevertheless enabled them to rise above the banal morality of the middle class. And in a similar connection, Plekhanov makes a point which has been glossed over by most radical critics, that "escape" is as much an assertion as a rejection of values—is not Surrealism rooted in a philosophy of mental and social disorder?

It should be evident by now, from the very terms in which I have discussed Plekhanov's ideas, that he was almost entirely concerned with the subject matter of art, or more accurately, with its social equivalent. Thus Plekhanov was basically a sociologist of art, which leads, in practice, to a sociological art. He tended to ignore the specific meaning of a work—that consciousness which distinguishes one artist from another though both may exhibit the same social or formal tendencies—and he evaded the central question of standards, of what is referred to philosophically as value judgments; with the result that he either relapsed into the most conventional formal standards in judging a novel or a painting, or he seized upon a moral and utilitarian conception of art. "Only that which is useful," says Plekhanov, "will seem beautiful." In the flight from Bohemia Plekhanov has landed in the pulpit.

The clue to this consumer-philosophy appears to be in the remark that "every political regime, in so far as it gives the matter any thought, invariably favors the utilitarian conception of art." Undoubtedly this is true of bourgeois censorship which requires apologists; but are we to assume that a revolutionary art is to be utilitarian, too?—a theory which Marx referred to in his criticism of Bentham as "the apparent absurdity which dissolves all the manifold relations of human beings to each other into the one relation of utility."

These are the pitfalls in a method which reduces, cultural phenomena to social forces, turning art inside out, so that its special vision becomes a superficial ex-



terior and the social effect its real meaning. Thus Plekhanov, starting with the valid premise that the criticism of art stems from its history, equated its history with that of social ideas and arrived at a purely ideological criticism: When a work of art is based upon a fallacious idea, inherent contradictions cause a degeneration of its aesthetic quality." The laws pile up until one fears the death of art from this legal cretinism. Fortunately, Plekhanov was discreet enough not to apply this law to Dostoyevski. And how explain the heritage of consciousness which all important art, like every social period, transmits, or the fact that a large area of aesthetic experience cuts across the boundaries of classes? Plekhanov reaches his most doctrinaire absurdity when he speaks of abstract and cubist art as so much piffle to amuse the leisure class—is this taste or theory? It seems not to have occurred to him that this art reached plastic conceptions which might have an important influence on a revolutionary art.

It is ironic that, in these essays at least, Plekhanov did not visualize the growth of a revolutionary art for modern times, yet his principles might well serve as an apology for the most literal, most banal, most didactic art. Fortunately we have just emerged from such a period, but Plekhanov's work can now serve as a check on the present tendency to dissolve revolutionary art in the spirit of good fellowship. Naturally, criticism should have no illusions about its ability, single-handed, to steer an art movement, but the least it can do is to avoid distorting its own subject matter. If literature and painting are to navigate between the Scylla of art without meaning and the Charybdis of meaning without art, a concrete criticism based on the classics and on the fugitive contributions of American radical critics must be built up—rooted, of course, in the art itself, for each new painting is a criticism of other paintings.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

*Surrealism.* By Julien Levy. Black Sun Press. \$3.00.

A compilation of poems, prose, philosophy, photos and painting (the five p's of surrealism) by most of the leading satellites of the movement. Many translations of hitherto unpublished poems as well as brilliant introductions to each of the important surrealists by Mr. Levy. The best summary of Surrealism in English.

*Art and Society.* By Herbert Read. MacMillan Co. \$4.00.

To be reviewed in next issue.

*Photography—1839-1937.* Museum of Modern Art. \$3.00.

Catalogue of the show reviewed in this issue. Excellent historical introduction, and reproductions of exhibits.

# EXHIBITIONS

## "Recent Fine Prints"

ANY serious consideration of the exhibitions presented this season at the Federal Art Gallery in New York City, of which the latest has been the show of "Recent Fine Prints" produced on the local W.P.A. graphic project, inevitably leads to the most vital problems in American art today.

From the beginning the question of the quality of work done on the art project has been a crucial point. In its early stages the project's creative potentialities necessarily had to be singled out amidst the inevitable confusion and uncertainty surrounding problems of organizing art production never before faced in this country.

In that situation the project received no more than luke-warm support from many liberals of the art world. They had ready to hand the stock set of objections: Art could not be subjected to government "regimentation." . . . Talent, not to speak of genius is rare, so why try to produce artists en masse? . . . They are entitled to jobs, but don't let them paint, . . . etc., etc. At times this "defense of aesthetic standards" led to a viewpoint singularly close to that of the Hearstian slanders levelled at the project artists as a group.

What of the attitude toward the project today? It is vastly changed. And this change is due to the impressive manner in which project artists have translated potentialities into achievement in a steadily rising curve of quality. No one with eyes to see can any longer miss the fact, brought home so strikingly by the splendid series of W.P.A. exhibits this season, that the art project has come of age.

The importance of this growing recognition of the high standards set by W.P.A. art can hardly be overestimated. It means that the organized project artists, who have kept the enterprise alive by their unrelenting struggle against retrenchment, can now marshal support never before available in their fight to counter the new threat of liquidation and to win permanent government patronage on a broad basis.

Bound up with this definite demonstration of quality production is a second factor of basic importance. That is the role of the young artist in that achievement. Consider for a moment the aforementioned "Recent Fine Prints" show. Characterizing the show in a foreword to the catalogue as "a stimulating experience and a rich reward," John Taylor Arms, president of the Society of American Etchers, observes

that "many names represented in this exhibition are unfamiliar even to one who has had exceptional opportunities to study contemporary American prints." An actual count reveals that eighteen of the forty-five participants, or 40 per cent, are not more than thirty years of age!

Contrast with this the fact that among the limited group that finds opportunities to exhibit in commercial galleries, those referred to as "young artists" are not infrequently old enough to be the parents of the new generation that has proven itself through W.P.A. In other words, artists working on government projects have an opportunity to develop their talents in their early youth which is seldom accorded those struggling in a hopelessly narrow competitive market.

But the most important consequence of the role of youth in project accomplishment is that it gives a new axis to the whole struggle for permanent government art patronage. Since the most vigorous growth of young American art has been so thoroughly identified with the project, it becomes clear that the demand for a permanent project is not merely a demand for support of a certain number of able artists, but for support of the main strata on whom depends the character and achievement of the coming American art.

Finally, a brief note on the manner in which that esthetic character is revealed in W.P.A. art. The exhibits attest to the fact that W.P.A. is the meeting ground for all the tendencies that currently bestir the American art scene. If there is a predominance of realism, that is easily accounted for by the consciousness of the producing artists that in that sphere lie the greatest possibilities for achieving an identity of artistic expression and social usefulness. It is not surprising that artists who justify their support by their social usefulness should be concerned with making that justification as clear and unequivocal as possible in their art.

But just as the existence of the project depends on a continuous organized struggle to counteract reactionary pressure on the administration for its destruction, so the artistic force and vitality of project art is dependent on the influence of more radical trends that by common agreement are tempered in project art. There is a real functional relationship between the problems of extending the scope and life of the projects and enlarging freedom of expression. Permanent government art on



an adequate scale will come only with that broad offensive of the masses on the political front which throws back reactionary influence in government and in that act opens up possibilities for a freer expression in all cultural fields of the genuine interests of the masses.

*Jerome Klein*

## Photography, 1839-1937

**T**HE significance of photography for popular communication is more and more evident. News pictures reveal life with startling and shocking power. Press photographs of floods and wars impinge on the eye with a hyper-real horror far more moving than synthetic hyper-reality. In the bizarre happenings of everyday existence there is a fantastic unfamiliarity which the artist's conscious and deliberate effort could never duplicate, but which the camera eye will relentlessly capture. For this reason the photographic medium has caught the popular fancy as painting never has in modern times. It has become, as Aragon said in his essay in the January *Art Front*, the channel for reaching the people.

In presenting photography to the world this important fact should be emphasized. Unfortunately this aspect of the medium was not well presented in the recent exhibition of a century of photography, held at the Museum of Modern Art. If the basic social value of the medium is not made clear in its premiere appearance in a museum dedicated to the cause of modern art, then the whole meaning of photography for the present is distorted and minimized.

It is necessary, therefore, to add a post-

script to "Photography, 1839-1937." Photography's scientific and technical evolution was well canvassed, showing how intricate is the medium. And indeed it is a serious question whether painting could put forth an equal demonstration of technical progress in the past century. For those who reject the cliché that a hand-made object is better than a machine-made, there is comfort in the thought that the technical complexity of the camera and its attendant lens, etc., is a guarantee that in photography artists are keeping abreast of the times.

Generally the function of photography for communication has not been sufficiently expounded, although the vogue is to talk of "documents" and "documentary" art. By that is meant, I suppose, that an object (or a work of art) partakes of the nature of a chronicle, an artifact, a record, a roster, a "Domesday Boke," or similar historical material, only of course in terms of its own medium.

To be sure, art in the best periods has been documentary as well as esthetic, and a great part of its beauty grew out of its sound realistic and recording function. With photography, however, it seems too easy to be casual regarding this utilitarian use. We speak of documents in a light sense and without understanding that the historian and recorder also exercises selection. Yet even the earliest daguerreotypists, handicapped by primitive equipment as they were, posed their sitters or arranged a composition of the landscape they were photographing. The best contemporary photographers practice the same creative control of their machine, only with a more highly developed knowledge of its poten-

tialities and with the benefit of the experience of the workers who preceded them.

To be documentary creatively implies that the photographer has a point of view and an objective. If his purpose is communication in a wide popular sense, he is obviously communicating content and subject matter. But what is this subject matter to be? Documentation of types, of so-called "action" pictures, only?

On the contrary, documentation means in the final analysis the imaginative and purposeful representation of the whole world seen by the camera eye—and by that token the human eye. Photographs of things and objects tell the story of mankind as much as the "candid" shot. In the past how have we learned about history? Not only from portraits and genre paintings, but also from the very rocks and stones, from the surviving architecture, from the things built by man. Photography has then a double range of communication, speaking to the present, but speaking also to the future and telling what sort of world it was in 1937.

*Berenice Abbott*

## American Abstract Artists

**F**OR various reasons, abstract painters in this country have had to put up with a fierce cross-fire of general opposition. The insolence of office as well as the dictates of the market have conspired against them; the supineness of critics, the howl of the yellow press, the philistinism of the museums and the host of pressures, great and small, which a predatory society can exert has been brought to bear against the relatively small number of native abstractionists.

Under such circumstances it is natural that abstract artists should sooner or later get together on the basis of mutual defense and general popularization of their viewpoint. The recently formed American Abstract Artists has already swung into action with a membership showing at the Squibb Building in New York, where thirty-nine painters and sculptors exhibited more than one hundred pieces.

Most of the abstract work was "total," that is, completely non-representational. Not a glimmer of the external world intruded itself into the pieces of most exhibitors. This viewpoint requires the utmost consistency or tragedy befalls. A canvas or space which depends solely and utterly upon the relationship of its colors, shapes, spaces and lines to give it esthetic meaning runs the serious danger of becoming uninspired decoration. If the shapes and colors are arbitrary, inspired by no unifying purpose beyond stereotyped space-filling, all is lost in an ambiguous maze. Not a few of the exhibits fall under this category.



*Photo by NED SCOTT from Paul Strand's Film "Redes"*



Other artists have realized the importance of *association* when dealing with totally abstract values. Balcomb Greene, for instance, restricts most of his forms to those of plane geometry and his colors to a few areas of black, white, cool blues and greys and a touch of scarlet. The associations of provocatively related geometric shapes and sensitive color naturally suggests infinity and universality. Thus the abstraction has specific meaning.

Or Werner Drewes, for example. His work suggests, in its apocalyptic shapes and colors, planets and moving spaces. I do not suggest literary conceptions nor do I infer that the artists mentioned had pre-conceived notions of space, infinity or other superterrestrial things. The fact remains that the *associations* of their abstract values are anchored in emotional experience.

A. N. Christie will take one or two colors as a general background and inscribe broad bold calligraphy across it in almost Arabic characters. Very fresh stuff, also associational and not arbitrary. Joseph Albers and Carl Holty are other painters of the utmost consistency, avoiding mere decoration for more provocative ensembles.

Of the artists more directly inspired by the shapes of this world, George McNeil and Louis Schanker seemed to have most to offer. McNeil, far from becoming arbitrary, related his color to the general grey-green of an interior. Pigment was handled emotionally, with broad feeling for natural forms, although none was specifically used.

Rosalind Bengelsdorf was eclectic, able but unnecessarily complex. Good painting, but without positive viewpoint. The same can be said for many others.

Of the sculptors, Robert Foster, Gertrude Greene and Warren Wheelock showed good things with the palm going to Gertrude Greene for her superb relief.

*Jacob Kainen*

## CALENDAR

*A. C. A.*, 52 W. 8 St. Water colors by Hy Cohen, May 2-14, American Group exhibition, May 17-June 1.

*AN AMERICAN PLACE*, 509 Madison Ave. Marsden Hartley.

*ARTISTS GALLERY*, 33 W. 8 St. Group show of oils, including Hecht, Ben Benn, Bowden, Sterling, Thal and others, May 4-24.

*BOYER GALLERY*, 69 E. 57 St. American contemporaries, May 3-22.

*CONTEMPORARY ARTS*, 41 W. 54 St. Recapitulation of 1936-1937 season, May 3-24. Summer exhibition, May 26-June 29.

*DOWNTOWN GALLERY*, 11 W. 13 St. Karfiol, Sheeler, Marin, Kuniyoshi, O'Keefe and Laurent.

*GUILD ART GALLERY*, 37 W. 57 St. Small oils by De Martini, Liberte, Reisman, Forbes, Zucker, Foy, Dirk, Stillman and Roszak, April 23-May 7. Gouaches by Jean Liberte, May 7-21.

*JULIEN LEVY*, 602 Madison Ave. Paintings by Paul Strecker, April 15-May 15.

*MIDTOWN*, 605 Madison Ave. Paul Meltsner, April 26-May 15. Fifty-dollar paintings by group, May 15-30.

*MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*, 11 W.

53 St. The Frobenius Collection of primitives, April 28-May 30.

*NEW ART CIRCLE*, NEUMANN, 509 Madison Ave. Living art, old and new, through May.

*UPTOWN GALLERY*, 249 West End Ave. Group show of water colors. Baylison, Lehman, Meyerowitz, Nagai, Rosenthal, Rosevaar, April 12-May 7. Group show of oils, May 10-June 1.

*VALENTINE*, 16 E. 57 St. Soutine, May 1-22.

## BIG WORDS BY BIGWIGS

(Continued from page 7)

Museum Directors and others of their ilk who have attempted to set up in their communities little dictatorships in art and who, in this process, have set out to terrorize the artists through their control of the market outlets for work in the smaller communities.

There is an alternative and a splendid one. It is the Federal Art Project, a national project set up in the summer of 1935 as part of the Work Relief Program of the Works Progress Administration. As part of this program, the Federal Art Project operates entirely upon funds granted by the Congress of the United States for work relief. Ninety per cent of the artists on this Project must come from the Home Relief rolls. Its fate is inseparably bound up, at least it has been up to the present time, with the fate of the entire Government program of work relief. This is important for this situation reduces to the absolute minimum the possible effectiveness of the personal political connections of any individual administrator of this Project. Because funds to support this Project are granted by Congress directly it has the possibilities for a greater democratic control over policy, direction and even administration. Furthermore, the Federal Art Project must depend directly upon the support of considerable sections of the population because the work which is done under its auspices must eventually become the permanent property of public institutions of various types. As these institutions must pay the cost of the material used in executing the work secured by them, it has been deemed necessary and desirable from the very first day of the Project to consider and consult the wishes of people who are in no direct way connected with the official machinery. These few points will serve to high-light the differences in administrative structure, operation and responsibility between the Section of Painting and Sculpture on one hand and the Federal Art Project on the other.

The Section represents in structure the ideas of a very small group of administrators who succeeded in organizing it mostly by virtue of their powerful political connections. The very idea of the creation of such a Project at this time originated within the mind of Mr. Bruce (this has been stated publicly in print by Mr. Dows). It was created by an order of an official of the Government, Mr. Morgenthau, who is not an elected official and consequently not directly responsible to the public for such action. We can impress the implications of this set-up upon our readers by quoting Mr. Bruce, who told a delegation of artists on January 4, 1937, that the Treasury Relief Art Project, then employing some 350 artists from the relief rolls, would be liquidated, because Mr. Morgenthau did not believe in running relief projects under the auspices of the Treasury Department. In this case the personal opinions of Mr. Morgenthau would have had the unfortunate result of throwing 350 artists from the relief rolls out of their jobs. Fortunately the Artists Unions forced the transfer of these artists to the Federal Art Project. The entire structure and operation of the Section illustrate the extent of its isolation from public control and consequent propensity to become the more or less "personal property" at public expense of a small group of bureaucrats.

The exact contrary is true of the Federal Art Project. Its structure and procedure derives basically from the fact that it operates on funds granted directly by Congress. As the members of Congress are the direct political representatives of the people of the United States, the Project must go to the people for support *on the basis of performance*. It cannot refuse to hire any artist certified by the relief authorities for any other reason than the fact that he can be proved not to be an artist. Consequently, the "catholic taste" of its administrators does not become the sole standard for the judgement of quality of work. We could cite more facts to the



above effect. These are sufficient to indicate the basic differences between the Federal Art Project and the Section of Painting and Sculpture and to make it quite clear that the former is in much more fundamental contact with the whole of the Nation and has infinite social possibilities not shared by the Section.

"At the peak of its employment record the Federal Art Project provided work for 5300 persons in the following four general categories.

1. The Fine Arts (murals sculpture, easel painting and graphic arts) 48 per cent of personnel.

2. The Practical Arts (posters, photography, Index of American Design, arts and crafts, and stage sets) 28 per cent of personnel.

3. The Educational Services (Federal Art Galleries and Art Centers, art teaching, research and information) 17 per cent of personnel.

4. Technical and Coordinating personnel, 6 per cent of personnel."

We quote from a brochure issued by the Federal Art Project "The W.P.A. Federal Art Project, A Summary" for a definition of the aims of the Project.

"The primary objectives of the Federal Art Project are to conserve the talents and skills of artists who, through no fault of their own, found themselves on the relief rolls and without means to continue their work, to encourage young artists of definite ability, to integrate the fine with the practical arts and, more especially the arts in general with the daily life of the community."

This statement delineates, within the limits imposed by the Appropriation Act of Congress, in simple and unpretentious language the kernel of the problems which must be solved if art is to continue and grow into a vital social force which will have a meaning for every American. You may contrast it for yourself with that stirring objective of "embellishing public buildings," the avowed aim of the Section.

In his introduction to the first national exhibition of the work done by the Project, Mr. Hoger Cahill, National Director of the Federal Art Project, had the following to say.

"It is fortunate that, under Government auspices, an opportunity for the development of significant new tendencies has been provided during these crucial times. The outcome is full of promise for the future. Certainly there is no dearth of genuine talent in this country—talent of a rich order. Under the most difficult circumstances, the American artists have shown themselves ready to attack new problems and to make fresh adaptations. They are growing in stature and in power. They

have the technique, the discipline, and the impulse to carry American art to new heights. *The question for the future is whether they may continue to maintain that sound relationship with a wide public which has been shown to be essential for a living art.*"

We likewise suggest that you contrast this forthright statement giving credit for achievement where that credit belongs, that is to the artists who did the work, with the contemptuous yapping of Mr. Rowan in his crib in relation to "a sister art." Out of sheer kindness and a spirit of charity we have omitted from this article whining statements made by Mr. Bruce to the effect that the artists of the country were lazy and were not participating in his competitions because they were not accustomed to doing a day's work. We have quoted extensively enough to expose the social convictions of Mr. Bruce. Contrast these with the closing sentence above which is a direct appeal on honest and broad social terms for continued and increased public support of the Federal Art Project in order to continue and develop the start already made. We need say no more in illustration of the differences of opinion between Mr. Cahill and Mr. Bruce as to the proper public and social function of art supported by public funds.

Two exhibitions of work done under Government auspices were held in New York City in the fall of 1936. One was entitled, "The Treasury Department Art Projects Painting and Sculpture for Federal Buildings." We have given a general estimation of the character of the work shown and will investigate this question



*Italian Woman: SAUL BAIZERMAN*

more in detail at a later date. The second, entitled "New Horizons in American Art," was the first national exhibition of the work of the Federal Art Project. The differences in title only serve to emphasize in this connection the truth of the contrasts that have been drawn between these two enterprises. The introductions continue this, for in contrast with Mr. Cahill's introduction, which deals with the problem of Government support for art in such a way as to make it an important progressive document in the history of art in our country, Mr. Forbes Watson has written a banal statement which is at one and the same time a lame attempt to explain the "limitations" of the Sections activity and to build them up as "the Government's one permanent section of painting and sculpture." In addition to this he indulges in some loose and critically irresponsible talk about the Section being the first organized plan to coordinate painting, sculpture and architecture and cited this as giving "the program its essential character of permanence and its social and educational force." On this point we will, at the present, only state that painting and sculpture cooperate with architecture under the Section's auspices in about the same sense that a victim cooperates with a stick-up man. In closing, Mr. Watson devotes a paragraph to social implications pointing out that the work of the Section "through its objective clarity gains its potentialities to bring homogeneity to a heterogeneous people." Comment is superfluous.

As we are, in the case of the Federal Art Project, apt to be suspected of prejudice we will quote exclusively from the *New York Times* in relation to the exhibition, *New Horizons in American Art*. We wish only to point out the manner in which critical comment was affected by the work of the Project.

Mr. Edward Alden Jewell said in his review of September 20: "For the true significance of this effort (the work of the F.A.P.) lies in the general stimulus that has resulted; in the quickened appreciation on the part of millions of people whose lives art had not before touched, or to whom art had meant singularly little in the social sense of the term culture." Further on Mr. Jewell sees fit to quote from an article by Margaret Marshall in *The Nation* to the effect that it would get us nowhere to assume that "the whole problem of the artist has been solved by putting him on relief; but the *Federal Art Project* does serve as a blueprint to indicate the function that art might and should perform in a civilized society." To this quotation Mr. Jewell added the significant remark, "And that, it seems to me, is the true touchstone."



Brave words these, particularly when we remember that they concluded a review which included remarks of sufficient disparagement to call for public comment in reply to them from the artists and from Mr. Cahill. We have noted over a long period of time that the reviews of Mr. Jewell rarely touch the social aspects of the work under discussion and we think it safe to conclude that even such a socially isolated critic as the dean of the *New York Times*, was forced, in this instance to become aware of the tremendous social importance of the Federal Art Project. When things reach the point of affecting Mr. Jewell in this way, then we can really say, "History has been made." We do not remember similar comment on his part on the occasion of the Treasury exhibition although he has a tendency, based upon inadequate knowledge of social events no doubt, to lump all the phases of Government support of art together.

We can state categorically that the Federal Art Project has in every respect displayed the proper setting up and function for the Government's Permanent Program for the Support of Art. There can be no question, not even on the part of the *New York Times*, that such permanent support is and will continue to be necessary for everyone will agree that private patronage no longer supplies an adequate basis for the further development of art in our country. The problem then is one of transposing an emergency program, designed to relieve unemployment among artists, into a permanent program which will carry forward the brilliant and in a certain sense unexpected promise of the work of the Federal Art Project.

This question of permanency is a current problem, raised long since by the artists through Art Front. It is a topic for serious discussion in the immediate sense

within the Administration circles of the Government. Mr. Watson has already, with the true air of a seer, stated that it was here. Mr. Roosevelt has proposed that certain phases of the Work Relief Program be made permanent under new departments of the Government and rumors have it that the phases of the program which have given work to unemployed writers, musicians, actors, dancers and artists would be included. *These are only rumors for no one is certain of his intention in this respect.*

Meanwhile there is the grave danger that the Federal Art Project, along with the other W.P.A. Projects employing cultural workers, will be severely crippled by the general tendency of President Roosevelt's administration to ignore pre-election pledges and the votes of the American people on November in respect to continuing and expanding the Work Relief Program. President Roosevelt has displayed every intention of cutting his requests for funds for the purpose of Work Relief to the bare bone. Such a move as this does not only carry the message of starvation to hundreds of thousands of W.P.A. workers, including those who do creative work.

It will be the beginning of the complete destruction of the finest achievement of American culture. We quote, for impartial authority, words written by Lewis Mumford in an Open Letter to President Roosevelt in December, 1935, at a time when the W.P.A. had ordered wholesale cuts and had called the police of New York City in to deal with 219 artists who had only demanded that their jobs continue. The 219 were brutally beaten, arrested and convicted. Lewis Mumford said: "To withdraw support at this moment would not merely strip away part of the value of the work already done; it would be to defraud fu-

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Within the Administration of the Federal Art Project there is a growing tendency to accept the general weakness of acceding to the pressure of reactionary forces for the curtailment of work relief. Our Administrators seem to be losing the proper historical perspective in their increasing propensity toward taking attitudes that can only be dictated by an unreasonable emphasis on the immediate and most convenient aspects of the problem facing the Federal Art Project. For instance, they have refused to fight for the much needed expansion of the Project to provide jobs for the unemployed, who number, in New York City alone, some two thousand registered for jobs. In the latter part of March they were asked to endorse the "idea of a Permanent Art Project based upon the present Federal Art Project and providing jobs for all needy artists."

Mrs. Audrey McMahon, in giving the official reply to an Artists Union delegation stated in effect that "the Administration of the Federal Art Project endorses the idea of the continuation of the Federal Art Project and it also endorses the idea of permanent Government support for art; however, where these two come together, we have nothing to say." After making this amazing statement she indicated that she was undertaking the investigation of the possibilities of establishing a permanent project structure which might operate on the same basis as the Section of Painting and Sculpture but in relation to State, County and Municipal Governmental units. We are informed that this proved too nebulous for any satisfactory discussion between the representatives of the artists and Mrs. MacMahon.

We will waste no additional words discussing the functioning of the Section and its worth in relation to permanency. However, there is one thing which the Federal Art Project has proved conclusively. Its achievement has been based strictly on the fact that it could not refuse to hire any professional artist who had been certified by the Home Relief authorities. On this basis an untold number of unknown but highly talented artists have been allowed to work. The services of these artists have been the chief factor in making the Project of major cultural significance in respect to quality of work. From this there can be drawn only one reasonable conclusion. A

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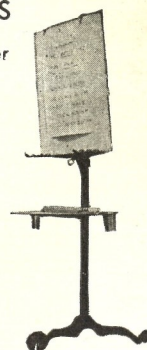
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These requirements are not merely economic. They are in their deepest implications cultural for unless these requirements are fulfilled, the artist cannot become a member of society in the complete sense of that phrase. Without permanent Government support, the art which has been developed in connection with the vital living mass of Americans will be irreparably stunted. Unless the above stipulations are made the basis on which that permanent support will be based, such permanency will become a social and an artistic mockery which can only "defraud future generations of the heritage that is justly theirs."

It is then out of concern for these serious questions that we call the attention of our readers to the current and official American Art Scene. The recent official whimsies of Mrs. McMahon are of the gravest importance for they have the aroma of cultural reaction. We offer our advice, "Be careful not to assume the duties or the mien of a mortician—for the odor of embalming fluid is unmistakable and extremely distasteful, not only to the artists but also

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